

LONGMAN'S MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXII.

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LONGMAN'S MAGAZINE.

MAY 1898.

The Duenna of a Genius.

By M. E. FRANCIS (MRS. FRANCIS BLUNDELL),
AUTHOR OF 'IN A NORTH COUNTRY VILLAGE,'
'A DAUGHTER OF THE SOIL,' &c.

CHAPTER XIII.

ADAGIO CON TENEREZZA.

THE eventful day of the concert dawned, cold, wet, and windy, with a biting, penetrating wind, that seemed to find out the inner recesses of every one's being, the better to produce misery and discomfort therein. Sir John set out in the afternoon for the Steinway Hall in a state as nearly approaching ill humour as so genial a man was capable of. The rain drifted into his hansom until he was obliged to let down the glass; and then the wind circled in cold damp eddies through the interstices.

There was certainly no appearance of a crowd at the door; but then he had come early on purpose. Within, the hall was so far but sparsely filled. He sat down in the place allotted to him by Margot, who had presented him with a ticket, and waited anxiously. He felt too nervous to endeavour to pass the time by going round to see Valérie and her sister. He wished ardently now that he had never volunteered his advice at all—the weight of the responsibility so lightly assumed seemed actually to crush him. If this concert were a failure, he told himself that he would have deserved the bitterest reproaches with which Margot had assailed him in bygone days; he would almost merit that she should now withdraw her confidence from him altogether.

People were beginning to arrive at last ; the cheaper places at the sides and in the rear of the hall were fairly well occupied. Ah ! here were the Lennoxes, and Margaret Elkin—good little souls ! They looked quite nice. They had donned their Sunday best, and Margaret had such a smart bonnet. They walked up the hall, smiling broadly all the way. Croft rose and went to meet them.

' You see we have all come,' said Miss Charlotte, ' though it is rather a bad day for Margaret's rheumatism ; still, as you made a point of it, John, we thought we would venture.'

' Mademoiselle Kostolitz offered to send us tickets,' put in Miss Maria ; ' but we told her you had given us some, and she was quite pleased—and a good deal surprised, I think.'

Meanwhile, Mrs. Elkin's eyes had been roaming round the hall.

' I don't see anybody here I know,' she remarked ; ' but I dare say more people will come presently. I hope, for Miss Kostolitz's sake, that a great many will.'

' Well, *we* came in force, did we not ? ' cooed Miss Charlotte. ' We shall make quite a brave show, sha'n't we, John ? —all four of us, you see.'

' Oh, Charlotte, I wish there were a dozen of you,' groaned Sir John, fervently. The sisters fluttered on, much amused and flattered, and Sir John turned a distracted glance towards the nearest entrance. Ah ! here was Lady Mary, followed by a stout lady with three daughters, every one of whom had ' country cousin ' writ large all over her person. He hailed their appearance with rapture.

' Where are the other sixteen ? ' he asked breathlessly.

' My dear, you didn't suppose I was going to drive them before me like a flock of geese ? Besides, I haven't got sixteen more. I could only scrape together another two or three. You see, most of my friends are out of town, and yesterday I was so busy——'

' You didn't keep your promise, in fact,' interrupted her nephew, turning from her curtly.

The hall was not so very empty now, he thought, glancing round once more ; no, really there were a good many people, some of them doubtless relations of Margot's pupils—he seemed to notice among them several instances of the type of school-girl described by Valérie. In that case, he feared, not very much profit would result to the sisters. Still, no one could say the hall was empty, he remarked to himself, more hopefully ; not empty enough to discourage Valérie—if only those horrid places for which

he was responsible could find occupants ! To his excited gaze these vacant seats seemed glaringly perceptible; if untenanted, they would strike Valérie's eyes at once when she emerged on the platform.

' Still disconsolate ! ' said a voice at his elbow. He started and looked round. It was the lady on whose assistance he particularly counted.

' Well, what have you done for me ? ' he inquired eagerly.

' I have come to your concert on this horrible day,' she returned, with an expressive shiver. ' Ugh !—how cold it is ! I think it is extremely good-natured of me.'

' Yes, indeed, it is awfully good of you,' agreed Sir John, with a sinking heart. ' But haven't you been able to—— ?'

' I did persuade a few people to promise they would come, but really I don't think they can be expected to this weather. I should not have come out to-day if I could have helped it, I know. Well, where am I to go—up at the top ? I suppose I may choose any seat I like ; you certainly won't fill them.' She was, and looked, cross and bored ; she really had worked hard in Sir John's cause, and it was not her fault if people would not come out on such an exceedingly disagreeable day ; therefore he need not have looked so disappointed.

She swept on, half expecting him to follow her, but he returned to his own place, a despair, almost ludicrous when the cause was considered, having now taken possession of him. Oh, those front rows ! They were not half—not a quarter—full. Sir John gazed at them till they seemed to swim and dance before his eyes. Then a faint stir made him look up : Valérie stood on the platform. He saw her pause and look round with what seemed to him a blank, astonished stare. She was very white ; her face looked even haggard in the strong light ; her white dress, planned with so much care, as he knew, appeared to enhance her pallor. It seemed to him that she scarcely looked pretty. She began to play a sonata of Grieg's of exceeding difficulty, but whether she were in reality nervous and unstrung, or whether Croft's disordered fancy cheated him, she had not gone far before he said to himself that she was ' not in her usual form.' He thought he had never heard her playing so expressionlessly ; once or twice he even fancied she made mistakes. In any case, this inaugurating piece left the audience cold ; only a slight modicum of applause was granted to her at the close, though Sir John clapped until the palms of his hands were sore, and Lady

Mary, leaning forward in her front bench, hammered the floor vigorously with her umbrella. Croft's spirits fell to a yet lower depth than before, if that were possible. So much depended on the beginning, both for Valérie herself and for her hearers ; and the beginning had not been auspicious. Player and audience were not in sympathy ; if he felt it, how patent must the fact be to Valérie. His eyes wandered from her to Margot, resting on the latter with sudden wonder and delight. If the one sister had not done herself justice, the other was looking her best ; her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were shining. He knew by the expression of her face that she had braced herself to meet the ordeal, and was straining every nerve to atone for Valérie's shortcomings. It seemed to him that for the time she was the greater artist of the two. Never had he heard her play so well—with such vigour and *aplomb*, and at the same time with so much grace and feeling. Though Sir John had been tardy in his musical studies, and but for the accident of his friendship with the Kostolitzes might never have pursued them at all, and though it pleased his friends to make a jest of his new-found enthusiasm in matters appertaining to the art, he had, nevertheless, a natural and very true love of music. Moreover, he was by nature sympathetic and appreciative, therefore it was with real artistic delight that he noted Margot's performance to-day.

But soon this aesthetic admiration of her playing merged, as he looked and listened, into a warmer and more tender admiration of her actual personality. Dear, plucky little girl ; she would not give in ! The odds to-day were against Valérie's success, but she would struggle to the last—cover their defeat by a brave semblance of triumph. He watched her little fingers as they flew over the keys—clever, capable little fingers, which worked so hard and achieved so much, how slender and pretty they were—the hands of an aristocrat, as he had thought once before. Then he looked at the little high-bred head, set so proudly on the slender neck ; at the soft hair, among the coils of which sparkled the comb which had long ago called forth the animadversions of Lady Rosamond Gorst. Dainty little head ! Diamonds would become it better than the cheap crystals which it wore. Diamonds ! The Croft diamonds ! After all, why not ? Where could he find a wife so rare, and sweet, and entirely lovable ? Lovable ! The word was ineffectual and tame. She was already loved, deeply and passionately ; and in his heart of hearts he knew that she loved in return.

So, while Valérie, with a white face and a sinking heart, faced a disappointed audience, and Margot did all that could be done with the intricate accompaniments, Sir John smiled and dreamed to himself. Perhaps, indeed, it would be more appropriate to say he found himself suddenly awake. He had been living in a dream for many weeks, and at last his eyes were open. The darkness, pregnant though it had been with sweetness, had rolled away, and now daylight, sweeter still and bright, was flooding his soul. *L'esprit du réveil* had come to him. He knew now the meaning of the vague, intangible hope and joy which had haunted this dream of his ; he had felt them near during the night, and had, as it were, groped ineffectually after them. Now in broad day he could see and grasp the reality. He loved Margot Kostolitz, and he would make her his wife !

How sweet it would be to clasp those little active, toiling hands, and bid them rest in his ; to tell her that she should have done with poverty and anxiety and disappointment, that she need suffer and struggle no more ! How delightful it would be to lavish on her all that his great wealth could procure ! Sir John was the least snobbish of men, and yet he felt a glow of pride and triumph at the thought of his position, his honoured name, his vast possessions, since Margot was to share them. As he pondered over all that he meant to do for her and pictured her surprise, her timid incredulous joy, his own soul was flooded with a rapture akin to intoxication.

What ! people were going away ! Was the recital over already ? The temperate applause which had greeted each item in the programme, and to which he had mechanically added his quota, had ceased. Valérie and Margot had disappeared. Some one was shutting the piano. There was a stir—a murmur of voices. Everyone was leaving. Rousing himself quickly, he hastened round to present himself before the sisters. There were a few others in the room, but Valérie's back was turned towards them, and she was apparently busying herself with the fastenings of her wrap. Margot, however, stood well in view, and had a gracious word for all who spoke to her, and a brave, bright smile. Croft went up to her hastily, with his head still in the clouds.

' Well, was it not a success ? ' he cried.

The smile disappeared, and she looked at him an instant before replying under her breath in Hungarian.

' You call that a success ? Valérie will break her heart, I think. I feared she would give way before the end. Did you

not see she was not in the least like herself? She did not do herself justice.'

'Well, if so, you more than made up for it. I never heard you play so well in my life.'

'Oh, I!' with an impatient gesture. 'What does it matter about me? I tried to cover her confusion, that was all. You see, she was disheartened from the outset. Why, there were rows and rows of empty places! She was taken by surprise, because we heard the tickets were going off so well. But I suppose it was the weather. Fortune never seems to favour us.'

Sir John had come down to earth again at the sound of the words 'empty places,' and now looked startled and confused. He was, however, coward enough to catch eagerly at the suggestion that the weather was the cause.

'Yes, hasn't it been a beastly day? I am sure lots of people would have come if it had not been for that. Well, I think I had better get you a cab, hadn't I? It is pouring still, I believe, and you must both be so tired. Mayn't I say a word to your sister first, though?'

'I think you had better not,' said Margot.

The expression of Valérie's little back was, indeed, distinctly forbidding. He lingered a moment longer to say: 'You know really it did not go off as badly as you think. Some of the people near me were quite enthusiastic.'

But here Margot interrupted him with a little exasperated gesture, at which he fled.

A few minutes afterwards he was putting the sisters into the four-wheeler he had found for them. He had offered his arm to Valérie in escorting them thither, but she had refused it curtly, and it was Margot's hand which had rested on it during the transit; he felt this hand tremble, and noticed that when the effort to keep up appearances was no longer necessary, she looked pale and sad; indeed, as the light of a street lamp fell upon her face, it seemed to him that she was on the point of tears. As he stood by the cab, distressed and remorseful, cudgelling his brains in search of consoling words which would not come, Valérie suddenly leaned forward from the interior.

'So much for your idea!' she cried furiously. 'It has been a complete failure, and it is all your fault.'

He was so taken aback by the unexpectedness of the onslaught that he stood by the door, gazing at her in absolute silence. But his defence was instantly and energetically taken up by a

well-known voice in the rear, and Lady Mary Bracken hurried forward.

'What is that she says? Well, I do call that too bad. The poor fellow has been slaving. Where is she? Where is Miss Kostolitz? It is so dark coming out. Oh, there you are! How do you do?' rapidly shooting two bony fingers past her nephew's shoulder into the interior of the vehicle. 'I am sure you oughtn't to scold Sir John; he has been wearing himself to a fiddlestring trying to dispose of tickets for you. I assure you he sent me twenty, and he has been pestering everyone I know.'

'Twenty-eight Pitt Street!' almost shouted Sir John to the driver, who had been looking round impatiently from under his dripping oilskin hat. 'Now stand aside, my dear aunt, or you'll be run over.'

Margot leant back in the cab, breathless and astonished. Valérie was in too great a passion to catch the drift of all Lady Mary said, but Margot heard and understood.

The words, coupled with Miss Maria Lennox's guileless announcement of Sir John's generosity towards them, and the hitherto inexplicable fact that the number of seats occupied in no way tallied with the quantity of tickets sold, made patent to her in a moment the whole of Croft's abortive project. It seemed to her that life could hold no further or certainly no more bitter depth of humiliation. She was not angry or resentful—she was too profoundly wounded for that—but she felt as though she could never look him in the face again. If only she could keep the knowledge from Valérie! With a little care, perhaps, she need never know.

Valérie would certainly never forgive him. Ah, it was too much! He had treated them as though they were children, duped them—with the best intentions in the world, it was true—but still, duped them. He was kind and generous, and had meant to help them, yet—oh! it was cruel. She responded absently, with a few soothing words spoken at random, to Valérie's tirade of passionate invective, but her mind was in a whirl. Why, merely from a financial point of view, this was a disastrous calamity! Sir John, of course, must be refunded for his outlay—it was not to be borne that he should indemnify them out of his own pocket against the loss which would otherwise certainly have been theirs. They had not yet fallen so low as to accept money from him; he should be repaid, and that at once, though the act of restitution must engulf all Margot's savings. Yes, they would find themselves,

now, owing to this ill-judged venture, ever so much worse off than they had been before. They had lost money and *prestige*—and oh! was there not a worse loss than any of these—where could their confidence now be in the friend who had deceived them? That night was passed by Margot in feverish unrest; she longed for day, for the moment in which it would be possible to rid herself of at least a portion of the load which weighed on her so heavily. In the morning she would meet Sir John at his cousins' for his customary lesson, would tax him with the deception he had recently practised, and ascertain the exact sum he had expended on their behalf. It seemed to her that she could scarcely breathe until she had freed herself from this obligation. If only the little ladies were out of the way—if she could even count on five minutes alone with him—what should she do if she were not given time and opportunity to disburden herself of this nightmare of humiliation?

Fortune seemed to favour her wishes, for when she entered the drawing-room she found Sir John Croft waiting for her alone. She had expected him to appear conscience-stricken and confused; she had indeed anticipated evidence on his part of the trepidation with which he usually awaited her displeasure. Surely he must know that she was displeased—no, not displeased—hurt to the heart's core; but he came forward to meet her with hand outstretched, and eager, excited face. He, too, had been counting the moments that must pass till her coming, and awaited it not with remorse, but with joyful impatience.

His aspect was so different from what Margot had expected that she drew back, turning a shade paler than before. She was surprised, wounded afresh, that he should be so lightly affected by what had made so profound an impression on her; but, perhaps, after all, he did not know that she had guessed his secret.

'Sir John,' she said tremulously, 'I am glad to have this opportunity of speaking to you.'

She paused: it was hard to say what she had been prepared to say, with those ardent joyous eyes fixed on hers.

'I, too, wish to speak to you,' he answered, 'and have told my cousins to leave us alone for a few moments. They think we have business together connected with the concert, good souls! and have promised not to disturb us.'

'The business on which I wish to speak to you is connected with the concert,' said Margot. She was trembling so that she could hardly stand and her voice shook, but mastering herself with

a strong effort, she continued more firmly, 'Sir John, I have guessed something.'

'Have you?' he rejoined, still looking at her gaily and tenderly. 'I wonder how much you have guessed!'

'Oh, do not laugh at me!' with a little burst of pained irritation. 'How can you laugh after humiliating me as you have done?'

'I!' exclaimed Sir John, this time with a start of genuine surprise.

'Yes. Can you imagine for a moment that I could fail to be wounded and humbled on discovering the trick you have played Valérie and me?'

'Oh, you mean about the tickets?' interposed Croft; he reddened a little, but still smiled as he looked at her.

'I do mean about the tickets,' said Margot, and to her intense annoyance the words came out with a sob—how could he stand smiling at her when he had treated her so? Why could she not find words to upbraid him, to humble him as he had humbled her? How was it that, do what he might, she could not be angry with him?

At the sound of her sob the jubilant expression fled from Sir John's face and was replaced by one of concern. He did not speak, however, and she went on, quickly and unsteadily:

'Of course you shall be repaid. Surely you must know that we could not allow this to pass. Can you not see that if we did not know you meant to be kind we should almost look on what you have done as an insult? Yes; it simply means that you are giving us money—making us a present of forty or fifty pounds.'

'And supposing I am,' said John, speaking very softly, and suddenly taking her hand. 'Supposing I am, Margot; what does it matter? Since I want to give you all I have and myself with it. My sweet, I am not good enough to be your husband, but I want you to take me.'

If she had been pale before, she became deadly white now; for a moment he thought she was going to faint. She stretched out her free hand and supported herself by leaning on the mantelpiece; she would have withdrawn the other but that he held it fast.

'I have taken you by surprise,' he went on eagerly. 'I think I am taken by surprise myself. I did not know what was coming. And yet, Margot, we might have guessed! We have been drifting closer and closer to each other all these weeks, and now the

time has come when we cannot do without each other. I know I cannot do without you, and I think, my darling, you cannot do without me. Why, how frightened you look! Is there anything so very terrible in the knowledge that I love you, Margot? And will you not be candid and own that you love me, too? for indeed I am quite sure you do.'

It was very characteristic of John Croft to do his wooing in this simple and straightforward fashion; to go straight to the end without pausing to consider whether his manner of procedure were altogether wise or politic. It was a little rash to show so plainly his security of Margot's affection, his conviction that she was already his. Indeed, no woman cares to own herself easily won, and Margot, above all, naturally reticent, and hampered moreover by inherited notions of maidenly reserve and decorum, might well have taken offence at his confident tone. Yet, perhaps, after all, Sir John had done well in following his instinct; all unprepared to meet this sudden attack she was the less likely to withstand it. So overwhelmed was she, indeed, by the complex emotions called forth by his words that for the moment she could neither move nor speak.

'Ah, my little Margot,' cried John, 'do not look so terrified—there is nothing to be afraid of. I will never let trouble or anxiety come near you again. You have had more than your share already, but now it is all over.'

Raising her eyes and seeing his handsome, kindling face bending over her, all alight with joy and triumph, she too was conscious of a sudden rush of joy, incredulous and uneasy, it is true, but overwhelming. His face came closer still; he would have kissed her—but, with a little startled cry, she broke from him.

'Oh no,' she cried; 'no, no—we are mad! It would be quite impossible.'

She dropped into the nearest chair and covered her face with her hands. Croft, not in the least disconcerted, advanced a step or two and stood beside her.

'If we are mad,' he remarked, 'it is a very pleasant thing to be a lunatic. I, for one, never want to be sane again. My little Margot, you have had such a hard life of it that you imagine it must be madness to dream of being happy. But we are going to be happy, for all that, you and I together—you and I, Margot. Do you not think I could make you happy, love?'

He was bending over her now, and gently drawing down her hands; the fascination of his gaze attracted hers and held it,

'You do love me, Margot?' he urged.

His ardour almost infected her; he read in her eyes that she loved him only too well; in another moment she would have uttered the words he desired to hear; but, rousing herself with an effort, she forced them back. Sitting upright and drawing away her hands, she said, instead, with all the firmness she could muster:

'I cannot be your wife, Sir John. It is like you to forget all that makes our union impossible; but I remember.'

'What do you remember?' he cried impatiently. 'Margot, you are not going to talk nonsense. There can be no question of trivialities between you and me.'

A faint colour rose to Margot's cheeks. 'I know I am not your equal,' she said a little proudly. 'I was not going to say anything about that, though I dare say many people would think the difference in our positions a very great obstacle to our union. Indeed, if no other existed, I think it would be dishonourable in me to allow you for my sake to take such a rash step—a step of which you might afterwards repent.'

The expression of his face warned her that she must not pursue that topic further, and she paused, continuing presently, however, timidly: 'And you know, Sir John, there is Valérie.'

'I have not forgotten Valérie,' said Croft gravely. 'I think you can trust me to be a good brother to her. She shall share our home until she marries, which she will probably do very soon,' he added with a smile.

He was fond of Valérie, and took a most sincere and already brotherly interest in her prospects. Nevertheless, it would be very sweet to have Margot one day entirely to himself. Margot's quick ears detected a hint of longing in his tone, and she now spoke decidedly, even a little bitterly.

'And naturally you would be glad to be rid of her. Ah, no, Sir John, this will not do! I have sworn to devote myself to Valérie as long as she wants me, and I think she will want me always. You see for yourself she is not like other people. She has to be watched over and guided, and I must be free to look after her. Then there is her art; she must have full scope for her vocation, and I must be always at hand. You are very, very good; but I cannot marry you. It would not be fair either to you or to her. I could not do my duty to you both.'

'And I, of course, must go to the wall,' put in Sir John.

'Ah,' cried Margot, looking up quickly through gathering

tears, for she could not endure this tone from him. ‘ Ah, do not be angry ! No, indeed, you would not go to the wall. It is because I fear, because I know——’

She broke off suddenly. Sir John guessed the confession which had been trembling on her lips, and a softer expression overspread his face ; but he gave no other indication of emotion, and went on, steadily and quietly : ‘ I think you are alarming yourself unnecessarily. There need be no clashing of wills.’

‘ Ah, but you do not understand how in every trifling matter they must, and would, clash,’ interrupted Margot. ‘ Take one small instance. When Valérie played in public, you probably would not wish me to play her accompaniments ? ’

Sir John suddenly laughed, and paused a moment before replying ; then he said, in the frank, ingenuous way which she had always found so attractive : ‘ Margot, there are some men who would no doubt promise anything in order to gain their heart’s desire, but I—well, I’m a poor sort of fellow in many ways, but if I am poor I am honest ! I will tell you candidly that I should not like you to play in public once you belonged to me.’

In spite of the renewed lightness of his tone, Margot felt that a steady resolution underlay his words, and knew that, love her as tenderly and ardently as he might, there were some points on which he was not disposed to give way to her. She had so often taken the lead in her intercourse with him, and had been so long accustomed to see him swayed by her influence, that the discovery of this new side to his character gave her quite a little shock. There was even a note of resentment in her voice as she said quickly : ‘ I should also belong to Valérie ! ’

Sir John looked down at her with a flash in his eyes.

‘ Come, Margot,’ he said, ‘ you must not trifle with me ! I honour your affection for Valérie, and would never try to lessen it. I think you know me well enough to trust me. As my wife you would be able to do more for Valérie than you have ever done before. But sisterly affection is one thing, and the love between husband and wife another. If you love me as I love you I must come first.’

‘ Oh, no ! ’ cried Margot quickly, frightened by a growing sense of her own weakness and of his power over her, ‘ no, no, it cannot be ! Valérie must come first ! She always has been first.’

Croft stood looking at her a moment in silence, and then said, throwing back his head with a little proud movement :

‘ Perhaps you are right, Margot ; it is better for us to part,

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for I will not be content with the second place. I love you too well.'

He lingered still, gazing at her as though to give her an opportunity for a word which might yet bring them together; but she set her lips, and looked back, proud and firm as he himself. Even at the moment when she had seemed about to yield to him, she had not appeared so fair and sweet as now that he was on the point of losing her. His face changed.

'Margot,' he pleaded, 'why should we spoil our lives when we might be so happy together?'

He spoke almost with a cry, and her heart echoed his words; but she only repeated steadily: 'I will not desert Valérie.'

'Then good-bye,' said Sir John.

'I hope you will forget me,' said Margot, faltering all at once.

He gave a short, angry laugh, and walked to the door without another word or glance.

Margot turned round. Even yet she might recall him. But for what? What could she say, after all, how could she make things right between them? He would not yield, nor could she.

In another moment the door closed behind him, and his quick, decided footsteps sounded on the stairs. Margot remained staring vacantly before her, scarcely able to realise what had taken place. John Croft loved her, and had come to tell her so, and to ask her to be his wife. His wife—John Croft's wife!—and she had refused!

The house door closed with a bang, and hasty footfalls were heard in the street below. It was all over, all over; she would never look upon his face again.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANDANTE CON VARIAZIONE.

It was perhaps as well for Margot that just at this time her mind should have been much absorbed in anxiety about her sister; thus the sadness which would otherwise have taken possession of her was in a measure diverted. Valérie, since the concert, had been sunk in the profoundest dejection. She scarcely ate; she slept badly; she would not speak, and repelled all attempts at consolation. 'Leave me alone,' she would cry. 'Do you not think

I know as well as you do how the affair stands? This time our failure has been irrevocable.'

So Margot watched and prayed, and was very gentle and patient, and hid away her own sad thoughts; and little Valérie sat all day staring at the fire with great gloomy eyes.

One day, however, Margot, coming upstairs after a weary afternoon's work, found her pacing up and down the little drawing-room, taking steps as long as her short limbs would allow of, her hands clasped behind her, and her face wearing a serious, not to say tragic, air.

' You have come!' she exclaimed, pausing opposite Margot. ' I am glad of it. I have taken a resolve of which I must tell you.'

Margot put her arm round the slight figure with a smile.

' And what is this weighty resolution?' she asked.

' Ah, it is nothing to laugh at. Margot, I begin to think I have dreamed my life away till now. All that we planned, all that we hoped, what has it come to? It is time for me to wake up and see things as they are. I am not meant to succeed as a musician; I must put away that dream as I have put away my violin. Do you know, Margot, I have locked it up? It is hidden quite away in the bottom of my big trunk upstairs. When I put it there I felt as if I were laying it in a coffin. It is dead, quite dead, and we will never speak of it again.'

' Oh, my Valérie,' cried Margot with a laugh that was half a sob, ' do not be so tragic! Your Cremona would not die so easily—it will live again for you and for many.'

' No, it is dead, I tell you, and buried. We will not speak of it again. I am going to be serious—to face the grim realities of life. Why should I let you do all the work and bear all the *ennuis*? I, too, will take my share. Henceforth I will work for my living.'

' And what will you do, my poor little one?' asked Margot, still smiling with tender indulgence, though tears were in her eyes.

' I have been thinking—there is not much I can do, is there? I could not teach, because I have no patience. I should go mad if I were to spend the day like you in the company of those stupid children. I should rap their clumsy hands when they played false notes. And I do not know how to sew—so I thought I would paint—Christmas cards, you know, and Easter cards. It is a good time to begin, as Easter is now soon here.'

' But, my dear child——' began Margot.

Valérie interrupted her : ‘ Hush, let me speak, I have thought it all out. People want cards perpetually ; Christmas cards, and Easter cards, at the proper times, and birthday cards all the year round. Well, you know how much they charge for handpainted cards in the shops—a shilling, and one and sixpence, and sometimes more. Naturally those cards have to be painted by some one, and that some one has to be paid for his or her trouble. Well, then, let us say that I paint three cards a day, earning on an average a shilling for each (for I should expect, of course, to be paid ninepence for the shilling ones, and one and threepence for the others). That would be three shillings a day—eighteen shillings a week—an income at once, you observe. Now, is it not well imagined ? ’

She was actually smiling now ; her little face was quite bright. But Margot felt an odd inclination to cry, rather than to laugh.

‘ Say, then, is it not a good plan ? ’ urged Valérie.

Margot kissed her many times, very lovingly, and at last found her voice.

‘ It is indeed a good plan, an excellent plan ; the only drawback, my poor child, is that you do not know how to paint. You have never had a drawing-lesson in your life. How will you set about this undertaking ? ’

‘ It does not in the least signify my not having been taught to draw,’ returned Valérie loftily. ‘ One does not want to know how to draw to do those things. I will begin by tracing—I will copy and observe very closely, and after a time I shall get into the habit. Now, do not be discouraging. How am I to live if I do not do something ? ’

‘ Indeed, indeed, I did not mean to discourage you,’ cried Margot quickly, for her sister’s face was beginning to cloud over, and tears of mortification were gathering in her eyes. ‘ I was only wondering how you would manage. But of course these things are simple.’

‘ Yes, that is just what I say—they are so simple that anyone could do them. You will buy me a nice little paint-box to-morrow, with little fine, fine brushes, and some tracing-paper, and some cards—I will begin with the ninepenny ones—and to-morrow afternoon I shall get to work.’

She rubbed her hands and began to skip about the room in her old way. After all, Margot reflected, it would at least occupy her and distract her mind. Anything was better than that she should sit all day mute and miserable, with her small face growing smaller and smaller, and her big eyes bigger and bigger, each time

that her sister looked at her. Let her mess away by all means, with her cards and her colours ; she would soon tire of them, but for a time the occupation would do her good.

Next day, therefore, Valérie set to work, and later in the afternoon Margot was called upon to admire her first production. It was a gelatine card which an hour's contact with Valérie's hot little fingers had caused to curl up at the corners. There was a brown cross in the middle, or rather leaning slightly to the right, and a white dove, with one wing sticking straight up and its tail very much cocked, perched on one side ; on the other a wreath of forget-me-nots, each flower having six petals. Underneath Valérie had painted in pink letters the word 'Resurgam.'

'You see, you see, my first attempt ! Do you not think I have succeeded very well ? I composed it all myself. "Resurgam," you see, is appropriate for Easter—at least I think it is, but I am not quite sure what it means. The cross is not perfectly straight, but I do not think you notice it, as I have filled up the space with forget-me-nots. There, Margot, you said I could not draw ! Well, I did those forget-me-nots entirely out of my head—even the leaves ! And my dove—is not my dove sweet ?'

'It is, indeed, very sweet ; but I do not quite understand why it has got a pink ribbon round its neck, and I don't think doves cock their tails like that. Did you draw this out of your head too ?'

'No, I copied it from a robin, and painted it white—I thought it such a good idea—if a robin cocks its tail, why shouldn't a dove ? I put the pink ribbon because I thought the picture wanted a little colour. Why are you looking at it like that ?'

'I was only wondering why you have made one wing stick up—oughtn't one to see the other wing too ?'

Valérie began to gather her paints together noisily and hurriedly. 'Oh, of course, if you find fault with everything, there is no use in my trying. I thought you would be so pleased, and considering I have never done anything like it before, I don't think it's at all bad.'

'My darling, no, I am not finding fault,' cried Margot hastily. 'I think you are very clever to have done it so well, and it was stupid of me not to see what you meant. Of course the dove is perching on the cross, isn't it ? and that is why its wings are stretched out. The other wing is stretched out too, but we can't see it.'

'You do not even like my pink ribbon,' murmured Valérie,

still injured. ‘ I had taken such pains with it, too. I tried to make the little bow at the back in the shape of a—a true lover’s knot.’

She was on the point of tears, so Margot did not dare to smile, though in truth the combination of ideas struck her as exceedingly comic. She kissed and soothed the little artist, and in the end had the satisfaction of seeing her set to work again, quite consoled, announcing that as this card was not altogether successful, she would perhaps let it go for sixpence.

‘ Poor love,’ said Margot to herself, ‘ if she thinks she will ever induce anybody to buy those little horrors I fear she will be disappointed ! But perhaps she will grow tired of the amusement before she has done enough to offer for sale.’

Valérie, however, had thrown herself into the new pursuit with characteristic enthusiasm. She toiled over her monstrosities with as much energy as she had been wont to bestow on her practising. The fingers, so clever and deft, so delicate and light of touch when they handled string or bow, were, as we know, awkward and clumsy as any child’s when they set about ordinary work. They were awkward and clumsy now, but Valérie, delighting in the bright colours and in the actual dabbling with brushes and water, was perfectly satisfied with her achievements. She went on drawing doves and crosses and flowers—the latter with entire disregard of all botanical rules ; she tried to depict cracked eggs with downy chickens emerging from them—but was herself constrained to own that these were her least successful efforts—and any other emblem that she considered appropriate to the Pascal time, and was for a week or two absolutely happy. Margot grew anxious as the days passed and the Cremona was still entombed in the black box, and Valérie, instead of taking up her musical studies again, continued to pore over her Easter cards. She would soon get out of practice, the elder sister feared ; in any case, she did not like to see Valérie neglect her true vocation for this whim. And was she not laying up for herself a fresh store of disappointments ? Nobody would ever look seriously at these productions of hers. Margot felt herself blushing at the thought of offering them to any shop-proprietor.

At last, one morning, a week or two before Easter, Valérie announced that she had now completed two dozen cards, and proposed that they should set out to a certain stationer’s in the High Street, Kensington, and endeavour to conclude a bargain.

‘ I am taking everything,’ she said. ‘ There are twenty-four

shillings' worth here really, but as the egg-and-chicken ones are not so well done as the others, I propose to let him have them all for a pound.'

'How would it be if we left the egg-and-chicken ones behind?' suggested Margot, inwardly shuddering as she remembered those works of art.

'Oh, that would not do at all! How foolish you are! I shall not leave anything behind; twenty is such an odd number; besides, the man will think us very generous to let him have these four in.'

Margot said no more, but set out with a sinking heart. Valérie, on the contrary, was in high spirits, chattering gaily as they walked along, and planning the treats she meant to give her sister out of her earnings.

'It is nice to earn money of one's own, is it not? I feel so proud—so proud! It takes even you, Madame Margot, some time to earn a whole pound.'

When they arrived at the establishment in question Valérie trotted up to the principal counter, and asked for the proprietor, with such a high and mighty air, that the gentleman hastened to await her pleasure. But when he found that the pretty creature who addressed him was not a great lady, bent on giving extensive orders, but a humble little would-be artist, requesting him to become the purchaser of a collection of almost childish daubs, he was absolutely speechless for a moment. When Valérie, not in the least abashed at his silence, proceeded to explain her views as to the average price which she intended to charge for her productions, adding graciously that she was willing, for this time, to throw three or four in, he laughed outright, and sweeping the cards together, handed them back to her with an ironical bow.

'They are not quite what we usually offer to our customers. I think people would be rather astonished if we asked them to buy any of these. No, thank you, madam, we have no use for them.'

Margot, blushing hotly, pulled her sister by the sleeve, and Valérie, after deliberately wrapping up her property, marched away, holding her head very high.

'It was a common shop, that,' she cried when they reached the open air. 'The man was very rude. I think he was angry because I asked more than he wanted to give. Let us try somewhere else.'

'My dear,' suggested Margot timidly, 'do you know I fear it is useless. These men deal probably with their own people, and do not care to employ anyone else.'

Valérie stopped short, whisking round so as to face her, ruffled and angry.

'It is nonsense what you say there. If that was so no one would ever get on. There must be a beginning to everything. Let us go to Regent Street, or Oxford Street, and try some of the really good shops; we shall be better treated than by those common people. See, there is the 'bus, let us take it.'

Margot judged it better to let Valérie find out for herself how vain would be the result of her endeavours than to try and dissuade her, knowing from experience how obstinate she could be when she chose, and fearing to irritate her further by protests and objections which would in the end leave her unconvinced.

They began, therefore, a weary pilgrimage, which resulted in intense disappointment on Valérie's part. Everywhere that she offered her poor little wares they were scorned or laughed at. She spoke not a word on their return from their fruitless wanderings, but when they once more found themselves at home, she spread out her twenty-four cards on the table, and looked at them for a long time very thoughtfully. At last, calling to Margot, she bade her draw near and look at them too.

'Do you find them very ugly—very badly done?' she asked wistfully. Her bright eyes were fixed searchingly on Margot's face. The latter was silent, vainly seeking for words which should not be too wounding, too discouraging. Valérie, seizing her by both arms, pinioned her firmly. 'You must tell the truth; you must swear to speak the truth! Bah! your face would tell me even if you tried to conceal what you thought. Margot, I see it in your eyes. You think those men were right; my cards are frightful, and no one would buy them.'

'No, indeed,' said Margot, eagerly; 'I do not think your work bad at all, Valérie. But it is, perhaps, not quite what people usually sell. They have their own ways of doing them, you know, the people who are accustomed to paint such cards; you perhaps have not quite got into the method. Who knows, they may use different colours.'

'I see, I see!' cried Valérie with a quivering lip. 'I have made myself ridiculous in attempting what I knew nothing about. Why, indeed, should I attempt to do anything? Everything fails with me.'

Gathering together all the cards with trembling fingers, she ran hastily across the room, and, before Margot could stop her, flung them into the fire. Then, dropping into an arm-chair, she cried as if her heart would break.

'I have a mind to burn my violin too!' she sobbed. 'Oh, Margot, why cannot I die? I wish I could die! I am always trying and hoping, and never succeeding in anything.'

'My dear,' returned Margot, who had knelt down beside her and drawn the little rumpled brown head on to her shoulder, 'you know we must not speak in the same breath of your art, your great talent, and these things! They served to pass the time. If you could have sold them you would have been pleased and proud; but, think, even if you sold all your pictures as fast as you could paint them, would they ever be to you a joy and a glory like your music?'

'Ah, my music! Do not speak of it! A joy and a glory you call it? Say rather my torture and despair. I think it will kill me—the longing to be heard and the maddening knowledge that no one wants to hear me.'

'Have yet a little more patience, my darling,' urged Margot, wiping away the tears that rolled down so fast. 'After all, you are only eighteen. How few even great artists are recognised at eighteen? Be patient and persevere. Success will come to you; fame will come. Some time you and I will laugh as we look back on a day like to-day.'

But Valérie only groaned, and Margot found it difficult to believe in her own cheery words. For days afterwards Valérie crept about like a little ghost, looking so pale and heavy-eyed, and seeming so depressed and apathetic that at last Margot determined to rouse her at all costs.

'Do you know, Valérie,' she said, approaching her one day, 'I have just seen a placard advertising a recital to-morrow by a new pianist—Paul Waldenek. At least, he has never before played in England. He is an Hungarian, I believe; it would be interesting, would it not, to hear a fellow-countryman? They say he is very good. Shall we go and hear him?'

'No, I will not,' returned Valérie moodily. 'I do not ever want to hear any music again.'

Margot said no more then, but when the sisters met again at dinner-time she handed Valérie a poster containing the programme of the morrow's recital, surmounted by the portrait of the performer. This represented a face still young, with fine, regular

features, and large eyes. The hair was rather long, brushed back from the brow.

'Has he got white hair?' interrogated Valérie, examining the paper with interest; 'or is it only that they have not shaded it? It is a good head, Margot, and a nice face. I dare say he is very much flattered, but he looks as if he had something in him. Perhaps, after all, we might as well hear him—it is not as if he played the violin,' she added with a sigh.

On the next day they therefore betook themselves to St. James's Hall, finding the street, as they drew near, blocked by carriages and cabs.

'There seem to be many people coming to hear this man,' remarked Valérie pensively. 'Think, Margot, how nice it would be if it were I that were going to play, and these crowds and crowds of people were waiting to receive me!'

Margot looked at her compassionately.

'Some day, my little one, some day, crowds will be waiting for you too. I am sure when Waldenek was eighteen he did not play to very large audiences.'

She spoke, however, somewhat dejectedly, for she, too, was contrasting the brilliant success, which apparently awaited the pianist, with her sister's failure a short time before; and with the memory of that failure came other memories too, less bitter but perhaps more sad. Valérie's next words touched on the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

'When I last came here, Sir John Croft was with me. Poor Sir John! I wonder where he is now! We never hear of him.'

As, at that moment, they approached the door of the concert-room it did not seem necessary for Margot to answer; and, once within the hall, Valérie's thoughts were diverted into other channels.

The hall was crowded from floor to ceiling; a certain breathless expectation controlling the mass of humanity so that it was almost still, until at length the great musician made his appearance, and then a sudden thunder of applause greeted him. Valérie sat bolt upright, her eyes dilated, her lips parted.

'Does his appearance please you?' began Margot smiling, but Valérie quickly raised a warning finger.

'Hush! He is going to begin!'

For a moment longer, however, Waldenek stood, bowing his acknowledgments. He was a tall, slight man, moving with a certain languid grace. The portrait, as Margot observed, had not

flattered his features, and could not, of course, render the charm of the ivory-white complexion, which seemed to accentuate the darkness of eyes and brows; the hair, light and fine as silk in texture, was snow-white, contrasting curiously with the vigorous frame and youthful face. The whole aspect of the man was so unusual, so picturesque, that at first it impressed the beholder curiously. He looked as though he had stepped out of an old picture; the head and cast of face, the very shape of the hands, were such as an eighteenth-century artist would have loved to depict. As he turned to approach the piano, Margot involuntarily glanced to see if that fine white hair of his were not fastened at the back with a bow of ribbon. In another moment the first notes broke the deathlike stillness which had succeeded the outburst of enthusiasm, and the whole of that vast audience listened as one man.

Margot was so carried out of herself that she forgot even Valérie, and remained in a trance of delight until the wonderful fingers dropped from the keys and the artist paused. Then she looked at her sister.

'Valérie,' she whispered, 'did you ever hear anything so beautiful? Did you ever even guess that the piano could be played like this? Oh, he is a great man; he is a master!'

Valérie put up her hand hastily.

'Do not speak to me,' she returned quickly, 'you disturb me. Oh, those stupid people!—why do they not stop clapping, so that he can play again!'

Not another word did she speak during the two hours that succeeded; she only seemed to wake when the player was recalled, and then she beat her little hands and struck her feet frantically on the floor, that she might add her mite of entreaty to the supplications of the multitude. The great man evidently felt himself to be in touch with this appreciative audience, which displayed for him an ardour and enthusiasm seldom bestowed by London concert-goers on the musicians who cater for their entertainment. The player was in sympathy with his hearers; their delight called forth a ready response. He played again and again, though he became at last so exhausted that he staggered as he rose to express his gratitude for the frantic ovation which greeted the third encore of the last item on the programme—a delicate, exquisite *Nocturne* of his own composition. Finally, by order of the Impresario, the piano itself was carried off the stage, lest this clamorous, insatiable throng might unduly overtax the strength of their idol.

As he stood bowing and smiling before withdrawing, there was a rush towards him: people clambered on to the stage to clasp his hands; pretty women, with faces still wet with tears, leaned forward, murmuring broken words of admiration. Never had such a sight been beheld in that place.

Margot had not believed that in this cold, unimpressionable England such enthusiasm was possible. She looked at Valérie, and was startled to see how white she was. Her face had a strange, fixed expression; she looked almost as though she were going to faint.

'Come away, darling—come. I should not have brought you here; it has been too much for you. My poor little love, I might have known the sight of this man's tremendous success would make you feel—'

'Oh, no,' interrupted Valérie, with a little gasp. 'No, it is not that; you do not understand. No, do not take me away yet—not while he is there.'

In another moment, however, Waldenek had disappeared, and the audience had begun to disperse. Margot led away Valérie, who was trembling so violently that, when they emerged into the street, Margot thought it better to take a cab and drive straight home, instead of waiting for the omnibus, which was their usual conveyance.

When the door was closed and they were driving homewards, Valérie turned suddenly to her sister.

'Oh, Margot!' she cried; 'oh, *malheur!* Do you not see what has happened? I have met my fate! I love Waldenek, and he will never love me!'

CHAPTER XV.

APPASSIONATO SUBITO.

PERHAPS of all the many troubles and vicissitudes which had fallen to Margot's lot during her career as duenna to her sister, this was the most serious and fraught with the most anxiety. She had at first tried to treat the matter as a whim, a passing fancy, to which it was not worth while to attach importance; but Valérie was for her part so entirely in earnest, so distractingly convinced of the depth and reality of her sudden passion for Waldenek, that Margot was at her wits' end to know how to deal with her.

'I always told you,' Valérie would say, looking at her earnestly and despairingly, 'that I never could love anyone whom I did not feel to be my master—one who was not greater than I. The moment I beheld this man I felt the power of his genius; and when I heard him play—oh! Margot, Margot, what shall I do? I feel that he is the only man I can ever love, and you know how hopeless it is for me to love him. I shall never know him; once, indeed, I might have dreamed that I too would be celebrated—that he would at least hear of my name—that one day we might even meet on equal terms. But what am I? A poor, obscure, disappointed girl, who can do nothing with her life—who will live and die unknown.'

Margot at first tried a little gentle mockery as a means of awakening her sister to the absurdity of her present craze; then she grew severe.

'Valérie, it is not like you to be unmaidenly. It is wrong to allow yourself to think in such a way of a man whom you have only seen once, with whom you have never even spoken. How do you know what he is really like? He may be very bad; many of these great artists lead wicked lives. He is, perhaps, in every way unworthy of your regard.'

'Bad! Unworthy!' repeated Valérie, scornfully. 'Where are your eyes, Margot?' Then she added, inconsequently, 'bad or good, he is my fate! I love him, and shall never love anyone else.'

'Hush, child—hush! I cannot bear to hear you. What has come to you—to you, who were always so refined and delicate in your ideas? To me it seems a dreadful thing to acknowledge such feelings when—when there is absolutely no ground for them. I, myself, cannot understand a woman loving who is not, herself, loved first; or, at least,' correcting herself hastily, while a vivid blush overspread her face, 'how, if such a misfortune were to happen to a girl, she could speak of it, own it so calmly, even to herself.'

'You are you, and I am I,' retorted Valérie, doggedly. 'I will not speak of it, since the idea disgusts you; I will keep it to myself; but it will be there; it will always be there. It is cruel of you to talk of its being unmaidenly; I cannot help my nature. The sunflower cannot help turning to the sun. He is my sun, and my heart and my thoughts will follow him wherever he goes.'

Margot groaned, and wrung her hands; 'Valérie, Valérie, you know I like to have all your confidence; if it is there you must tell me of it; but, *ma mignonne*, do try to be sensible. This

thing is impossible : can you not make an effort to fight against it, to put it out of your mind ? After all, supposing you were to hear that Waldenek was a married man ?'

' He is not,' interrupted Valérie, savagely.

' But, if he were ? You would then be obliged to cease thinking of him.'

' If he were !—if he were ! He is not, I tell you ; and, even if he were, what does it matter ? It would make no difference. He will never know, in any case ; and I could not answer for my thoughts. Ah ! how scandalised you are ! There, I will speak of it no more to you ; I will only speak of it to my Cremona. Ah, my Cremona !—my faithful friend, thou at least wilt understand and sympathise.'

She flew out of the room with burning cheeks, and presently returned, bearing the exhumed violin tenderly in her arms ; then she began to play. Irritated and anxious though Margot was, she could not help being thrilled by unwilling admiration as she listened. One by one each item of Waldenek's programme was reproduced by Valérie. When she came to his own compositions she threw into her rendering of them such tenderness and yearning passion that tears rushed to Margot's eyes.

' Ah, Valérie, you are a great artist ! You are a genius ! Why cannot the world hear you ? If you could take your proper place, these idle fancies would leave you.'

' Listen ! listen !' cried Valérie, her face alight and eager, her eyes shining like stars ; ' listen, did it not go so ? Ah, how beautiful it is ! His fingers were wonderful ; but my Cremona can say more than any piano. Listen ! Do you not hear his soul crying, longing for something that is withheld ? Margot, something is wanting to him too. Great as he is, his life is not complete ; he wants something—he wants me.'

' Valérie, you are going mad !' gasped Margot.

' No, it is true : my Cremona has told me ; you can hear it for yourself. Is not his music more beautiful when I play it ? Ah, if we could play together ! Margot, Margot, if we could play together—if we could be together always ? Do you not see how my art would complete his ? My life would make his perfect ; my love would fill up that void in his heart of which his music speaks. Oh, Margot ! why can we not meet ?'

The hand which held the bow dropped, and her head fell forward on her bosom. All Margot's irritation left her ; she was unspeakably alarmed. Were the child's delicate artistic brain and

highly strung nervous organisation giving way under the pressure of this sudden fierce excitement, coming as it did after long-continued strain and disappointment? What was to be done? What steps could she take to avert this threatened calamity?

After much persuasion she induced Valérie to lay aside her violin and lie down; but she was conscious, while she moved about the room, watering her plants and rearranging the shabby furniture, talking meanwhile of every subject which she could conceive likely to distract Valérie's thoughts, that those large glowing eyes were gazing at her too absently, and that the mind of her sister was centred on the one engrossing subject.

At early dawn next day Margot woke with a start; Valérie's form was absent from her side. Jumping up hastily, she ran to the door, and on opening it caught the faint sounds of a violin coming from the room below. Running downstairs to the little drawing-room, which looked very ghostly in the grey light, she found Valérie standing, an unreal, ethereal little white-robed figure, playing Waldenek's *Nocturne*. With loving entreaty she lured her back to bed; and though the little shivering form soon grew warm again, and by-and-by Valérie actually slept, Margot lay wakeful and miserable till the usual hour for rising came.

As the days passed, Margot's uneasiness increased rather than diminished. Valérie was, it is true, less excited than at first, and not altogether so unreasonable; but it was evident that her thoughts were still absorbed in this new passion, or fancied passion. She bought not only the pieces which she had heard Waldenek play, but every one of his published compositions. Few of these were intended for the violin, but she made renderings of her own; taking his themes, she wove them into beautiful quaint fantasias. It seemed to Margot that she had never realised before the wonderful gift of the little creature; and yet it was anguish to her to listen to the strange, sad music which filled the house all day long; it seemed to her that through it all she could hear the heart of her sister wailing and yearning for that which it would never obtain.

So the weeks wore away, and March came and went, and April, full of promise and suggestion, even in smoke-begrimed London. The parks were ablaze with delicate spring bloom; the glow of the almond trees lit up faint exquisite fires along the garden paths; little crisp, curled baby-leaves stretched themselves out of their sticky brown cradles; above the smoke of the city the sky was delicately, ethereally blue; and one day Valérie took to her bed.

On endeavouring to rise that morning, she had fainted; and

now she lay, with her small face nearly as white as the pillow ; all the vitality that was left to her seeming to be centred in her feverishly bright eyes.

Margot was terrified ; it seemed to her that Valérie must be going to die. Valérie was of the same opinion herself, and announced the fact with absolute certainty.

'There is nothing to live for,' she said. 'I should be rather glad to die, if it were not for you, Margot.'

But when the doctor came he scouted the notion. It was a clear case of nervous exhaustion, he said ; the girl had been working too hard, perhaps ; she had evidently over-taxed her strength. Was there anything preying on her mind ? What she needed was absolute rest, plenty of milk, fresh air, and change of scene. If it were possible to take her away her recovery would be much more rapid. Did Mademoiselle Kostolitz know Wiesbaden ? He would recommend Wiesbaden. It was an excellent place for people suffering from nerves, and not—looking hastily round the poor little room—not at all expensive. Would it be possible to take Mademoiselle Valérie to Wiesbaden ?

'Anything would be possible that is desirable for my sister's health,' said Margot.

'Well, then, take her away to Wiesbaden next week if you can. Let me see ; this is the beginning of May—keep her there for the summer if you can manage it, and when you bring her back she will be quite herself again. Wiesbaden is beautiful at this time of the year. Keep her up on the high ground among the woods, on the hills ; let her drink as much milk as ever she can, and live in the open air, and she will be quite robust by the time autumn comes.'

He went away, much pleased with the programme he had drawn out, and not guessing that it would be a little difficult to put into execution. When the door closed behind him Valérie wriggled impatiently under the bedclothes.

'I don't want to go to Wiesbaden,' she remarked ; 'I am sure it is a stupid, tiresome place. I would much rather die and go to Heaven.'

'I could not spare you, you see,' returned Margot, stooping down and kissing her ; 'and you are not nearly ready for Heaven yet—do not flatter yourself. You are much too naughty ! Saint Peter would shut the door in your face.'

So intense was Margot's relief at finding that her sister was not dangerously ill, that she was ready to laugh at anything. Even the problem of ways and means did not appal her, though

somewhat complex in view of the long journey, and enforced residence for three months, at least, in a strange place, where she would be spending instead of earning money.

'It is all very fine,' pursued Valérie. 'How are we going to get there; and how are we going to live when we do get there?'

'Let us get there first,' returned Margot gaily; 'then we will see. Do not be afraid; I will manage it somehow.'

By-and-by, however, when she was alone, she thought over the matter in a more serious spirit. The undertaking was a grave one. She would have to give up her lessons in London, of course, and might in consequence lose her pupils, and find herself without any reliable means of livelihood on her return. Well, she must chance that; she had made a beginning before, and must make one again, trusting to be favoured by fortune. The actual means at her disposal were small, unless she availed herself of her reserve fund in the savings bank. This, since Valérie's unlucky concert, she had always considered to belong rightfully to Sir John Croft. The sum realised by the sale of tickets had been sufficient, as he had calculated, to pay all expenses; but Margot had persistently looked on this money as rather a gift from Sir John than the legitimate result of her sister's labours.

Some day she meant to repay him—later on, when the memory of what had passed between them should be less fresh. She had meant to draw out her savings only when the time came to refund Croft. But now, in this sudden, urgent necessity, the thought came to her that after all they were hers, to make use of as she chose. Sir John's quixotic plan had been conceived and carried out solely in the single-minded desire to help them. How wounded he would be now, could he know that Margot, in her distress, refused to avail herself of the means actually at her command because he had indirect claims on them! After all, there would be nothing dishonourable, nothing ignoble about the act, since, if she had chosen, she could have been mistress of all he had. If he had been a little less guileless, a little more prudent in carrying out his plan, she need never have known that he was the sole purchaser of the tickets in question. He had meant so kindly, he was so generous; why should she not be generous too?

'I will do it!' said Margot to herself with burning cheeks. 'Oh, my friend! you are good and kind; but I do not like to use money which belongs to you. Nevertheless, I will put my pride in my pocket and do it.'

Then and there she began a letter to Sir John. She felt she

could not take this step without his knowledge, since in so doing she was breaking a resolution of which he had been aware.

'My dear Sir John,' she wrote, 'you remember when we parted I told you I must pay you back the money you expended on those tickets. The only reason I did not at once return it to you was because I feared you would think me unkind and ungracious, and be hurt. But I always meant to do it, and was only putting off until you had—what shall I say?—forgotten me, or remembered without pain the episode in your life of which I was a part. I know you so well, my dear friend, that I scarcely think such can be the case yet; but I earnestly pray that it may come to pass; and, indeed, I am quite sure that by-and-by you will find out that there is nothing at all wonderful about me, and that it must have been your own kindness of heart which made you think so highly of me. But now I want to tell you that I am going, after all, to use the money I owe you. I want it, and so I am going to take it. Valérie is ill, and has been ordered abroad. You know yourself that this will entail many expenses; therefore I am going to avail myself of your help. I know that you will not misconstrue my motives, or despise me for changing my mind. You know me well enough to understand that I do not like doing it; but for Valérie's sake it shall be done, and I think it right that you should know of it. Now, this letter does not need an answer; I ask you not to answer it. It is far better for us not to hear of each other; and I should not have written to you but that I felt I was bound to let you know I had retracted my resolution. Believe me, dear Sir John, yours sincerely, Margot Kostolitz.'

She did not venture to read over this letter, but despatched it hastily. She had forbidden Sir John to send a reply, and yet perhaps she expected one. For the next few days she started and coloured whenever she heard the postman knock; but no letter came, and she was unreasonable enough to feel a sinking of the heart. It would have been kind if he had sent a line just to ask about Valérie. She wished now that she had not written so lengthily, perhaps so effusively; above all, that she had left out that sentence about thinking he had not yet forgotten her. Of course he had forgotten her; it was very evident he had, and her entreaty that he would refrain from answering her letter was altogether superfluous. The little episode to which she had alluded was over and done with; it had passed completely out of his life. If even the memory of it remained, it had probably caused him shame and annoyance.

(*To be continued.*)

Hymn

IN THE TIME OF WAR AND TUMULTS.

() LORD ALMIGHTY, Thou whose hands
 Despair and victory give ;
 In whom, though tyrants tread their lands,
 The souls of nations live ;

Thou wilt not turn Thy face away
 From those who work Thy will,
 But send Thy peace on hearts that pray,
 And guard Thy people still.

Remember not the days of shame,
 The hands with rapine dyed,
 The wavering will, the baser aim,
 The brute material pride :

Remember, Lord, the years of faith,
 The spirits humbly brave,
 The strength that died defying death,
 The love that loved the slave :

The race that strove to rule Thine earth
 With equal laws unbought ;
 Who bore for Truth the pangs of birth,
 And brake the bonds of Thought.

Remember how, since time began,
Thy dark eternal mind
Through lives of men that fear not man
Is light for all mankind.

Thou wilt not turn Thy face away
From those who work Thy will,
But send Thy strength on hearts that pray
For strength to serve Thee still.

HENRY NEWBOLT.

The Living Garment of the Downs.

THE South Downs, in their cultivated parts, are seen at their best in July and August, when the unreaped corn turns from green to red gold: whether the tint be yellow or red, it strikes one as more intense than on the lower levels. Then, too, among the ripe corn, along the ragged fringes of the field, and close to the dusty path, the bindweed, adorned with its delicate rose-coloured blossoms, runs riot; and twining in and out among the dry, bright stalks, its green, string-like wandering stem has something of the appearance of an exceedingly attenuated tree-snake. Why is it that this most graceful weed, seen in the wheat, invariably gives me the idea of a sentient being delighting in its own mischievous life? It is the pretty spoilt darling of the fields who has run away to hide in the corn, and to peer back, with a roguish smile on its face, at every passer-by. Perhaps the farmer is partly to blame for the fancy, for the bindweed vexes his soul, as it will vex and hinder the reapers by-and-by; and he abuses it just as if it had a moral sense and ears to hear, and ought to be ashamed of itself.

Here one may see the corn reaped with sickles in the ancient way; and, better still, the wheat carried from the field in wains drawn by two or three couples of great, long-horned, black oxen. One wonders which of the three following common sights of the Sussex downs carries us further back in time: the cluster of cottages, with church and farm buildings, that form the village nestling in the valley, and seen from above appearing as a mere red spot in the prospect; the grey-clad shepherd, crook in hand, standing motionless on some vast green slope, his grey, rough-haired sheep-dog resting at his feet; or the team of coal-black, long-horned oxen drawing the plough or carrying the corn.

The little rustic village in the deep dene, with its two or three hundred inhabitants, will probably outlast London, or at all events London's greatness; and the stolid shepherd with his dog at his

feet will doubtless stand watching his flock on the hillside for some thousands of years to come; but these great, slow, patient oxen cannot go on dragging the plough much longer; the wonder is that they have continued to the present time. One gazes lovingly at them, and on leaving them casts many a longing, lingering look behind, fearing that after a little while their place will know them no more.

If unlimited wealth were mine I should be tempted to become the owner of one of these great hills, to place upon it, as a gift to posterity, a representation in some imperishable material of these black cattle engaged with their human fellow-creatures in getting in the harvest. Doubtless the people of the future would say that the hill was never really mine to dispose of as I thought proper; but I imagine that for their own sakes they would respect the statuary, the memorial of a vanished time:

Cold Pastoral !
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man.

To begin with, a sculptor of genius would be required, a king among artists; and the materials would be gigantic blocks of granite and marble—red, black, grey, and yellow. From these would be wrought, twice or thrice the size of life, a group: a partly loaded waggon, drawn by three couples of great black bullocks, attended by four or five labourers in their rough grey garments: strong men with brown bearded faces and smooth-cheeked youths; one on top of the load, the others with their forks tossing up more sheaves; the oxen holding up their horned, shaggy fronts—all but the leaders, who have more freedom; and these would be turning aside with lowered heads, eagerly snatching mouthfuls of yellow straw from a sheaf fallen by chance in their way.

I have simply described what I saw in the course of my last late July ramble on the downs; and it seemed only natural to wish to be able to set up a copy which should remain unruined by time and weather for at least a thousand years. The arrangement of the group as well as the form of the creatures composing it—men and great rough-hewn cattle—was wonderfully fine; but I also think that colour was a principal element in the fascinating effect the spectacle produced—the contrast of those large living black masses with the shining red and gold of the wheat. How

strikingly beautiful—startlingly, one might almost say on account of its rarity—this contrast of black and gold is in nature may be seen even in so comparatively small a creature as a blackbird, perched or moving about amid the brilliant yellow foliage of a horse-chestnut or some other tree in October. Again, a large mass of yellow sunlit foliage seen against a black rain-cloud shows us the same contrast on a grand scale.

The downs are never anywhere tame; but I do not care to remain long in the cultivated parts. It seems better to get away even from the sight of labouring men and oxen, and of golden corn and laughing bindweed blossoms; good to leave behind even the broad green uncultivated slopes, to go on to the wilder places where there is no shepherd with his dog and flock, nor sight nor sound of any domestic creature. Happily such desert spots still exist, wild as when the vanished bustard had his home in them; miles upon miles of rough vegetation; acres of luxuriant furze, flowerless now at the end of summer, darkest green with a bloom of lighter green, bluish in tint, on its tops. The furze is like the pine in this; and looking down upon it one can fancy oneself a Titan standing waist-deep in a vast pine-forest, with the blue-green feathery tree-tops all about one. Elsewhere the furze may be seen growing among other bushes, appearing as blotches of darkest green among greens of various lighter shades; trailing brambles, and briars still waving aloft a few white and red roses; and in and out among them, hanging everywhere in beautiful rags, and binding bush to bush with ropes of many-shaped leaves, convolvulus and fragrant woodbine, wild clematis in its silky beard, and briony beaded with green and scarlet berries. Among the bushes on the lower slopes one stumbles on places of extraordinary fertility, where the thistle, foxglove, ragwort, viper's bugloss, agrimony, and wild mignonette grow to a man's breast; while over them all the mullein lifts its great flowery rod to a height of six to nine feet. From these luxuriant patches you pass to more open ground covered with golden seeding grasses, and heather, fiery purple-red, and emerald-green spots powdered white with woodruff, and great beds of purple thyme. One afternoon, tired with a long day's ramble in the burning sun, I cast myself down on one of these fragrant beds and almost fell asleep. That night when I threw off my clothes I noticed that the fragrance still clung to them, and when I woke next morning the air of the room was so charged with it that for a moment I fancied myself still out of doors, resting on that purple flowery bed.

Here on the high downs, in the burning sun, the flowers are more intense in colour than those that bloom in the shade and close shelter of the woods in the Weald, even those of the same species—the poor

Half-faded blossoms, pale with heat
And full of bitter summer.

Looking round upon this living garment of many colours, where the glowing orange-yellow patches of the ragwort are most conspicuous, one can fancy that the strayed pack-horses of a silk merchant of the olden time have passed this way, and that the sharp claws of the bramble have caught and pulled the packages to pieces, scattering far and wide the shining fabric of all the hues in the rainbow. This brilliancy in the hue of the flowers has a counterpart in the greater intensity of life in the creatures; or so it seems to me. The hum of the bees; the lightning-quick movement of the lizard and snake, especially the smooth snake, when one is so fortunate as to catch a glimpse of him—a sinuous, swift-moving band of a shining golden-brown colour; the frantic scuttling into cover of the disturbed rabbit; the lively movements and music of the small birds—all give one the idea that the hottest time of the summer is their period of greatest activity. The linnet has his home here, and continues to breed until August: fledgelings and even eggs may be found every year down to the middle of that month. But the song most often heard at this season is that of the common bunting; and in this open sunny world I prefer him to his neighbour and relation the yellow-hammer. The sound is certainly bright, and, like some other bird voices, it is associated in my mind during hot and brilliant weather with the appearance of water spouting up and sparkling in the sun. Probably such expressions as *needles of sound*, *splinters* and *shafts of sound*, *jets of sound*, &c., to be met with in writers of bird music, are not wholly metaphorical, but actually express the connection existing in the writer's mind between certain sounds and sights. The common bunting's little outburst of confused notes is when heard at the same time seen as a handful of clear water thrown up and breaking into sparkling drops in the sunlight.

These gardens in the wilderness, which make the thought of our trim, pretty, artificial gardens a weariness, are not too many: in most places the un-tilled downs are bare of furze and bramble and the plants that take advantage of the bramble's protection,

and are close cropped by the sheep. Their very smoothness gives them a character which is quite unique and has a peculiar charm. Flowers are abundant and in considerable variety, but many that are luxuriant in rich soils, wherever there is shelter and protection, here scarcely look like the same species : they have changed their habits of growth, their form and size, to suit the different conditions. The luxury of long stems, the delight of waving in the wind, and the ambition to overtop their neighbours, would here be fatal. Their safety lies in nestling down amid the lowly grass, keeping so close to the earth as to be able to blossom and ripen their seed in spite of the ever-nibbling sheep—the living lawn-mowers perpetually moving about over them. The vegetation has the appearance of a beautiful tapestry worked in various shades of green, roughened with the slender dry bents standing out like thread-ends from the green texture ; flecked, and in places splashed with brilliant colour—red, yellow, blue, and purple. Or if you look at the flowers with the sun before you they appear like shining gems sewn into the fabric and forming an irregular pattern. The commonest flowers of the close-fed downs are mostly quite small : the creeping yellow rock-rose ; clovers red and white, and the small yellow trefoil ; musky stork's-bill—mere specks of red ; little round-leaved mint, a faint misty purple ; rest-harrow, with minute pinky butterfly blossoms ; and woodruff, like powdery snow newly fallen on the green earth. They are too numerous to name ; but the largest and most conspicuous is the dwarf thistle—a great amethyst among gems of other colours and smaller size. Though so large relatively, it is really small, so that when the queen humble-bee drops on it she blots out the purple disc with her black hairy body.

It is a fairy flora, with a fairy fauna to match it. Where there are no bushes and rough herbage there are no birds, except a few restless wheat-ears, the first arrivals and forerunners of the great irregular flitting army that will by-and-by inhabit the downs for a brief period before their departure over sea. The creatures that impress us most are the insects. We think less of the innumerable small, inconspicuous snails—scarcely at all, unless we happen to hear the crunching of their delicate shells beneath our feet as we walk. Of insects, flies thrust themselves most on our attention ; it is, in fact, impossible to overlook creatures that conduct themselves in so wildly eccentric a manner. One big yellow fly like a honey-bee comes directly at you with a loud hostile hum or buzz, hovers for a few moments, dashes away in a

straight line, turns off at a tangent, and, rushing back again, proceeds with extraordinary velocity to describe curves and circles, parallel lines, angles, and other geometric figures, in the air ; and finally drops down within a few inches of you, to remain motionless as a fly carved out of a yellow pebble until the impulse sends him off again. What his motives are, what it all means, we are unable to guess ; we can only conclude in our ignorance, judging from appearances, that he is mad ; that, in fact, the proverbial March hare is a pre-eminently sane and sensible creature in comparison. Somewhat of this light-headedness is, I imagine, seen in most of the flies, from the burliest bluebottle to the small gilded variety. What would it be, I wonder, if these minute creatures grew to the size of ducks and geese ? Our whole time would be spent in watching their amazing, meaningless antics ; nothing else would be talked or even thought about in the world. In the end, we should become strictly nocturnal, in order to be out of their way, or else we should ourselves go mad in their company.

The singularity of another quite common species is in his colouring ; on his jet black body he wears a broad transverse crimson bar. The scientific names of these flies may doubtless be found in Curtis or Westwood, but to the ordinary man it is enough to see and wonder at such fantastic beings. Butterflies are abundant ; a brimstone yellow shining in the sunlight has a very splendid appearance as he flutters airily by you on his way ; but the larger brilliant-coloured species rest not here, where the green flowery surface is too smooth for them. A brown, a skipper, the small heath and small copper—these are the species that are at home on the sheep-fed downs. Most abundant is the little pale blue butterfly of the chalk hills ; in fact, he outnumbers all the others together. Sitting on the grass, you can sometimes count as many as thirty or forty fluttering about in sight and near you at one time. It is curious to note that the hue of the sky and atmosphere on this insect's wings appears to have 'entered his soul,' to make him more aerial in habits and light-hearted and playful in disposition than his deeper-coloured relations. If one has ever seen the great blue morpho butterfly of the tropics, one recalls its wonderful beauty, soaring high in the sunlight, its colour changing in depth at every moment ; now pale as our pale little blue of the downs, now azure, now deepest sapphire ; and now flashing white as polished silver, or as crystal. This

is the angel among butterflies, as our small blue of the downs is the fairy ; and, wide apart as they are, it is the heavenly hue in both that distinguishes them above other creatures of their class.

As a compensation for their greater activity the little blues have a shorter day than the other kinds ; like little children who have been running about playing all day long, they go to bed early. Before six o'clock, when other butterflies are still abroad and active, when the sun is more than two hours from setting, and the humble-bee has yet two hours of labour before him, they are tired out and their briefer day is finished. Now most butterflies when they go to rest tumble anyhow into bed ; in other words, they creep or drop into the herbage, take hold of a stem, and go to sleep in any position, their appearance being that of a dead or faded leaf. The blue has a quite different habit. As a rule, even where the down is smoothest and without shelter, there exist slight hollows or depressions, where the grass is higher and rougher than in other places ; and to such spots the blues gather from all around ; but instead of creeping down into the grass, they settle on the very tips of the dry bents. At some spots in an area of a few square yards they may be found in scores ; one or two or three, and sometimes as many as half a dozen, on one bent, sitting head down, the closed wings appearing like a sharp-pointed grey leaflet at the end of the stem. It is hard to believe that they can really be asleep, sitting thus exposed, their great black eyes looking very wide awake, the afternoon sun pouring its light into their tiny brains ; but when touched they scarcely move, and they will even suffer you to pick them off and replace them on the bent without flying away ; and there they will remain through the night, however strong the wind may blow.

What we call sleep, in an insect resembles the somnambulistic state, rather than sleep as we experience it. Thus this resting butterfly can be made to act, and he usually does the right thing. He keeps his hold on the bent when the wind beats ; and when after being plucked off he is replaced, he grasps it firmly again ; finally when tossed up he flies away, and slants down until he touches the grass, then fastens himself once more to a stem ; but there is no doubt that he does it all unconsciously, like a person in a hypnotic condition doing what he has been willed to do.

The little blue butterfly's habit of roosting on the tips of the bents is, I imagine, advantageous, and may be one cause of the

abundance of this species. At sunset, if you narrowly observe the ground in one of those depressions or hollows where the grass grows thickest, and which are the sleeping-places of all the small butterflies and other diurnal insects of the downs, you will be surprised at the number of the rapacious species of various kinds to be seen busily quartering the ground like so many wood ants in quest of prey. They do not climb to the tops of the slender bents, and the small blue is therefore safe from them ; but it is a wonder that any of the skippers and other species that creep into the shelter of the grass should escape the multitude of insect foxes, cats, and weasels prowling about in search of a meal.

When all the small butterflies and diurnal flies and beetles and the quaint goat-faced grasshopper have gone to rest, the humble-bee is still at work. No short day for him ! (*It or her* it ought to be, but let that pass.) He reminds me of a London omnibus driver who was talked to by a zealous Socialistic friend of mine on the advantages of an eight hours' day. His reply was, 'I don't at all hold with them principles. Ain't a day got twenty-four hours ? And what does that mean ? It means, I take it, that there's twelve hours for work and twelve for rest. Half one and half the other. There's no getting over that—it's too plain. I've always worked twelve hours a day, and, say what you like, J ain't going against nature.'

That is also the humble-bee's philosophy ; but, although he is very stable-minded, there are moments when he is tempted to depart from it. The thistle flower overcomes him with its deliciousness, and he will stick to it, feasting on its sweets, forgetful of the community's claim on him, and of the law of his being, until he is no longer in a fit condition to go home. At all events, he refuses to do so. Walking about on the downs in the fading light you will find the belated reveller half buried in the purple disc, clasping it affectionately to his bosom ; and, however stupefied with nectar he may seem, you will observe that he still continues to thrust at the small tubular florets with his proboscis, although probably with a very uncertain aim. If you compassionately touch him with a finger-tip to remind him of the lateness of the hour, he will lurch over to one side and put out one or two of his anterior legs or arms to make a gesture waving you off. And if your ears were tuned to catch the small inaudible sounds of nature, you would doubtless hear him exclaiming with indistinct utterance, ' Go 'way ; for goo'nness sake don't 'sturb me ; lemme be—I'm a' right.'

It is noticeable that even in his cups he never wholly loses the characteristic dignity of manner coupled with gentleness we so greatly admire in him. There may be in his order creatures equally intelligent; but morally, or at all events in manner, he is decidedly their superior. So peaceable and mild in disposition is he, so regardful of the rights of others, even of the meanest, that he will actually give place to a fly coming to feed at the same flower. It is on this account that, alone among insects, the humble-bee is universally regarded with esteem and affection. In his virtues, and in all that is best in him, he is very human. It is therefore not strange, during a late walk, when we bid good-night and good-bye to the darkening downs, that it grieves us a little to find so estimable an insect in such a plight.

We often say, and it is easily said, that this or that animal is human-like; but if the truth could be known about such matters we should probably find that the social humble-bee, with all his virtues, is just as far removed from us as any other creature with an articulated cylindrical body. It is sad to think, or so it appears to me after a day agreeably spent on the downs in the society of this small people, that in spite of all our prying into nature's secrets, all our progress, and the vast accumulations of knowledge at our disposal, we do not and never can know what an insect knows, or feel what it feels. What appearance this visible world has to an eye with twenty thousand facets to it is beyond our power to imagine or conceive. Nay, more, we know that these small bodies have windows and avenues which ours are without; that they are conscious of vibrations which for us do not exist; that millions of 'nimble emanations,' which miss us in spite of our large size, hit them. We can gaze through a magnifying glass at certain of their complex organs of sense but cannot conjecture their use. They are as great a mystery, or as meaningless, to us, as our most delicate and complicated scientific instruments would seem to a wild man of the woods. If it were not for our limitations—if we could go a little beyond our tether—we could find out the cause of the seemingly mad behaviour of the fly.

De Quincey wrote very prettily about what he called 'gluttonism'—the craving of the mind to know and enjoy all the good literature and music and art work that had been produced, and finally to know the lives of all men—all who are living and all who had lived on the earth. It strikes one that this craving, as he described it, though he says that it afflicts us all, and that he himself had been reduced to an extremity of wretchedness by

it, must be set down as one of the many inventions of that fascinating but insincere writer. Speaking for myself, if the power to attain to all that De Quincey craved, or pretended that he craved for, were mine, I should not value it ; I should give it all to be able to transform myself for the space of a summer's day into one of these little creatures on the South Downs ; then to return to my own form and place in nature with a clear recollection of the wonderland in which I had been. And if, in the first place, I were permitted to select my own insect, I should carefully consider them all, since they differ as greatly from each other as bird from serpent, and fish from mammal. I should pass in review the slow beetle, heavily armoured, and the fantastic fly, a miracle of inconsequence ; the esteemed humble-bee, and the wasp, that very fine insect gentleman in his mood of devilish cheerfulness ; the diligent ant, absorbed in his minute business ; the grasshopper, with his small stringed instrument and long grave countenance ; and the dragon-fly, with those two great gem-like orbs that reflect a nature of an unimaginable aspect. And after all I should make choice of the little blue butterfly, despite his smallness and frivolity, to house myself in.

The knowledge of that strange fairy world it inhabits would be incomunicable, like the vision vouchsafed to some religionist of which he has been forbidden to speak ; but the memory of it would be a secret perennial joy.

W. H. HUDSON.

A March Hare.

I

THE possession of a princely fortune, and an unshakeable disinclination to accept the advice of others with regard to its disposal, had rendered Sir Peregrine Brooke the despair of philanthropic associations, and of those scientifically charitable bodies who prefer (it would seem) the exposure of one impostor to the clothing of three shiverers. Early in life, on succeeding to the possessions and title of his last surviving relative, he had been quickly made aware of the attitude commonly taken by the world towards persons of great wealth, especially when, as in his own case, they happen to be free from what are brutally, though only too correctly, known as ‘family ties.’ But almost as quickly he had come to regard this isolation as his most valuable defence against the onslaughts of humbugs and bores; a bewilderingly universal devotion to the female sex had enabled him to reach, free of the embarrassment of matrimony, his five and fiftieth year; and as for the other assaults to which his position of necessity exposed him, he had contrived, by sedulously cultivating a reputation for eccentricity, to keep the number of his acquaintances within manageable limits—a rare achievement for a rich man. After a long and severe struggle—conducted, on his side, at any rate, with scrupulous politeness—he had achieved this satisfying result: he was able to enjoy his leisure without fear of invasion by importunates who had no right to the title of friends.

This fortunate gentleman was sitting alone one fine morning in his London house. March was making, that year, a really lamb-like exit; and the welcome salutation of sunrays twinkled pleasantly on the brown and gold of the library, on the table set with breakfast-things, and on the baronet himself, occupied in peeling a rosy apple. His clean-shaven face, with bright eyes peering from below iron-grey eyebrows, gave to him, in the

opinion of some of his friends, something of a monkish look ; others, mindful of his erect bearing and of a certain unobtrusive elegance in his costume, maintained that he had more the appearance of a soldier. Sir Peregrine had, in fact, been an athlete ; he was still a scholar, and the room in which he sat was lined from floor to ceiling with his unique collection of seventeenth-century literature.

Sir Peregrine had not finished the peeling of his apple when his Turkish servant came in to inform him that Miss Nevil had arrived, with apologies for so early a visit, but that she was very anxious to see him. Directions were given to admit the lady without delay.

II

Miss Jane Nevil was a young lady of attractive appearance, independent tastes, and no fortune, whose acquaintance with Sir Peregrine had begun only some few months before her visit to him on that fine March morning. Their first meeting had been accidental, and the medium of introduction a tipsy cabman, noisily reiterating his opinion both of her and of the strictly legal fare which she had handed to him. The street was a remote one ; ribald little boys and saunterers from the 'pub' at the corner were beginning to gather round, when Sir Peregrine, who happened to be driving past, perceived a lady in difficulties, grasped the situation, and in a moment had convoyed Miss Nevil across the vicious circle of beery vituperation which had enveloped her so embarrassingly. Arrived in a less turbid atmosphere, he told the grateful girl his name, and carried her off in his brougham to her home in Bayswater. A cup of tea was offered and accepted ; and Jane's mother, the worthy but commonplace relict of a Colonel with whom Sir Peregrine had been on nodding terms, was manifestly delighted to receive so important a personage in her drawing-room.

Since that first meeting a genuine friendship had grown up between Sir Peregrine and Miss Nevil. He liked her unconventionality, and was especially pleased when she fell, quite naturally, into the way of treating him without any of that deference which is supposed to be due to the old, but which is, in fact, a very tiresome substitute for intimacy ; besides, she had a sense of humour and a pretty taste in English poetry.

Miss Nevil was admitted into the sunny library by the obsequious Turk. Sir Peregrine greeted her warmly, and was informed that she had already breakfasted. She was nevertheless

persuaded to accept an apple, and while he was peeling it for her he asked the reason of her welcome arrival at that early hour.

Miss Nevil opened her purse—which, like all other ladies, she invariably carried in her hand—and took from it a folded sheet of note-paper. ‘Read that,’ she said. Sir Peregrine handed her the peeled apple on the end of a fork, glanced at the paper—murmured ‘Good Heavens!’—and read to himself the following remarkable composition :

Those looks of love I late did live upon
 Gaze now with scorn upon my overthrow.
 That spring of joy that knew not ebb or flow,
 Has vanished, and the beacon-fire that shone
 No longer shines to point me up and on.
 What wonder, if the source of life should go,
 That life itself must disappear also?
 How shall the light stay when the lamp is gone?

Therefore I hasten hence into a place
 For ever wrapped with darkness as a veil,
 Yet moon-lit, love-lit, in my memory;
 Now I have seen the greater light grow pale,
 'Tis time the mortal moon should hide her face:
 You and the world will get no more of me.

C. E.

Sir Peregrine's expression during his silent perusal of this precious production was that of a man who is swallowing a very nasty drug. Having read the verses to the bitter end, he laid the paper on the table, and contemplated it with a kind of sideways glance, as though he were looking at some interesting yet repulsive anatomical specimen. Then he drew a deep breath and said :

‘That is the most abominably bad sonnet I ever read. Apart from the disgraceful jerry-building of its construction and the poverty of its ideas, it is cram-full of bits from other authors. *You get no more of me*, is Drayton : *Up and on*, is Browning ; *Mortal moon*, is Shakespeare ; *Into a place*, is some Elizabethan—perhaps Sir Walter Raleigh——’ He rose, as though to verify his suspicions by a reference to the library, but checked himself. ‘The author deserves a flogging. By the bye, who *is* the author?’

‘The author,’ she replied reluctantly, ‘is Mr. Ernshaw. You have met him sometimes at our house. ‘The fact is,’ she went on hurriedly, ‘we were, in a kind of way, engaged to be married.’

Sir Peregrine's consternation at the idea of anybody, and Miss Nevil in particular, marrying the author of such a bad sonnet prevented him from asking her to be more precise. Noticing his look of horror, she hastened to add : ' But he never wrote anything of the sort before, upon my word of honour ! It must be a symptom. It is all of a piece with his strange behaviour last night ; in fact, it may be all fancy, but I'm frightened about him, Sir Peregrine ! '—she spoke with evident emotion—' and I came here, not to ask for your sympathy because such a dreadfully bad sonnet had been sent to me, but to get some advice as to what ought to be done. Mother's no good in an emergency like this.'

He said encouragingly : ' Tell me all about it.'

' I will,' she replied, ' and as quickly as possible. Oh, I feel that I may be wasting time, and that something ought to be done at once ! When I said that I was not exactly engaged to Mr. Ernshaw, I meant that when he asked me to be, last year, I told him that I liked him very much indeed, but that I was not certain that I liked him quite well enough to marry him. So I refused to consider myself bound to him in any way. Well, you know, he's in the Foreign Office.'

' A genteel, but unremunerative, occupation,' observed the baronet.

' Exactly. And he has just enough money to live upon comfortably as a bachelor. Of course mother couldn't bear the notion of my marrying him. She calls him a *detrimental*—I can't think where she picked up the word—and she can't understand the kind of engagement that I got him to agree to. She says "a girl is either engaged or not"—as though I should submit to be governed by a home-made maxim ! However, I took no notice, and all went well until she tried to make me break definitely with Charles. Then, all at once, I felt much more inclined to marry him, especially when I began to suspect that she wanted me to accept that tiresome Mr. Topham, who has lots of money.'

' Amos Topham,' observed Sir Peregrine ; ' I remember him, too, at your house. A gentleman with barley-sugar legs, and with a peculiar combination of jowl and side-whisker which I believe to be absolutely incompatible with the literary or artistic temperament. Well, so you don't like Amos ? '

' I detest him ! When I guessed what mother was thinking about I thought the time for action had arrived, and, as Charles had always wanted a more definite agreement between us, I naturally expected that he would be pleased to hear that I was

ready to make one. I told him so yesterday, but to my surprise he didn't take it at all nicely ; perhaps I chose the wrong moment for making the announcement, because he had just been having some difficulty with the head of his department, and was in a very depressed state of mind. I thought it would console him to hear that I liked him enough to marry him whenever he wished. But it didn't.'

'Very odd,' said Sir Peregrine. 'How did he take it ?'

'He began talking in an injured tone, and said that I had insisted on an indefinite engagement although he had always objected to it—that it had been all very jolly for me, no doubt, but that he had had a most disagreeable time of it, and so on. Then he actually hinted that I had only changed my mind because I had begun to consider him as a kind of refuge from Mr. Topham—as if I could ever be made to marry against my will ! Of course I couldn't stand that, so I said— Well, I needn't trouble you with what I said ; but he didn't like it, and began to talk a lot of nonsense about resigning his post at the office, and going to Australia to prospect for gold.'

'Ridiculous,' said Sir Peregrine. 'His chief, Sir Julian Blunt, told me the other day that he was one of the most promising young men in the service. I confess I find it hard to believe, after reading that unhappy sonnet. Is it possible that the other young men at the office could write anything *worse* ? However, I suppose he perpetrated it out of office hours ! What happened next ?'

'I told him that he was silly. No man can stand that ; and Charles is dreadfully sensitive to ridicule, so he lost his temper and talked more nonsense. At last he said that I had treated him disgracefully, that all was over between us, and rushed away, saying that I had seen him for the last time.'

Sir Peregrine smiled. 'I don't think the situation is so very terrible,' he said.

'Well, of course I thought it would be all right again next day. But this morning, instead of an apology, I received that dreadful sonnet. It was brought by his servant, who told me that Mr. Ernshaw had left London and had not said when he would return. Now, you may think me absurd, but you must remember that I like him, in spite of his nonsense, better than any one else in the world'—Sir Peregrine raised his eyebrows in momentary surprise at this confession—'and when I had read the verses I began to wonder, and wonder, what they could mean, and what it

was that he was going to do, till at last I began to feel afraid that he might—that he might do something rash.'

Sir Peregrine asked himself if she could possibly be thinking that the young man was such a jackass as to be contemplating suicide. He did not want to suggest the notion to her, so he inquired diplomatically—

' You don't really suppose that he is likely to—to do anything irretrievably foolish ? ' She hesitated.

' Well,' she said, ' I am not so sure ; in fact, I can't say exactly why I am afraid or what I am afraid of. But he might by some precipitate action ruin his prospects—by going off to Australia, for instance.'

' Not at a moment's notice, surely ? '

' I hope not, but he was always rather abrupt in deciding on a course of action. But that's what I've come here for, Sir Peregrine ! I want you to advise.'

He did not attempt to laugh away her apprehensions, which, indeed, appeared to him to be sufficiently ill founded. He rang the bell. ' The first thing to do,' he said, ' is to go to his rooms —Jermyn Street, is it ?—find out where he has gone, if possible, and discover anything else that may throw light on his proceedings. Achmet ! call a hansom.'

She was evidently anxious to take part in prompt action of some kind. ' Let me come with you,' she said.

' Of course,' he replied ; and, having put Mr. Ernshaw's sonnet in his waistcoat pocket, he handed her into the cab.

III

Mr. Ernshaw's servant seemed at first disposed to be somewhat reserved in his communications to Miss Nevil ; he knew her well, and regarded her with that instinctive distrust which is felt by all bachelors' servants towards a person whom they consider to be a danger to the permanence of a comfortable establishment, as yet happily free from the irritating supremacy of woman. It was clear, however, from his manner that he was uneasy on his master's account, and on hearing the name of his other visitor he readily enough submitted to impart all that he knew. He said that Mr. Ernshaw had come home late the night before, ' and not in the best of tempers, sir.' He had walked straight up to his bedroom, banged the door, and had been heard walking up and down for a long time after.

'And this morning, sir,' said the servant solemnly, 'Mr. Ernshaw was up and dressed at half-past seven.'

'Was that an unusually early hour for him?'

'It was, sir, Mr. Ernshaw not being what you might call an early riser. But he did something still more unusual when I brought him his breakfast; didn't touch a morsel—not to eat, that's to say.'

'He did drink something, then?'

'Drink something! I believe you, sir. And it wasn't *ewyfy*, nor yet *tea* neither. I wouldn't have believed it, sir, if I hadn't been in the room at the time, having brought the cruets which I'd forgotten, what with breakfast being so *extra* early, and he such a sparing gentleman with his drinks.'

Miss Nevil, who was becoming a little impatient, put in 'Well, what *did* he drink?'

The man continued deliberately, with an obvious feeling for dramatic effect, 'He took down that bottle, miss, from that side-board and filled a tumbler—a *tumbler*, sir; and drank it off in three gulps.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed the Baronet, who had inspected the bottle. 'Why, it's Benedictine!'

'It is, sir. Never saw such a thing in my life—and nigh on half a pint!' Sir Peregrine gasped.

'And what did you do?' asked poor Jane, rather weakly.

'Do, miss? I did nothing. But what I *expected* to do was to put him to bed and send for a doctor. So I just made belief to be arranging something at the sideboard, and stopped in the room.'

'And what was the effect of this extraordinary breakfast on Mr. Ernshaw?' asked Sir Peregrine with genuine curiosity.

'Why, sir, he just sat as still as a stone for about ten minutes, and then he turns round sharp, and tells me to bring him a *Bradshaw's Guide* and a *Whitaker's Almanack*. Yes, sir, he looked as if he'd been turned into stone, and every bit as steady! Well, I gave him what he asked for, and as I was a bit nervous about him—as you may suppose—I just peeped over his shoulder when he was looking into *Whitaker* to try and find out what he was after. But he only runs his eye over the "Calendar for the month of March," and then puts the book down on the table. What he wanted *Bradshaw* for I can't say, because I had to go off again and fetch him ink and pen and writing-paper, and when he'd got them he told me to leave the room. I just hung

about on the landing, still feeling very uneasy ; and after another ten minutes or so he rang his bell and told me to take a letter to your address, miss, and say he was going out of town. Then when I got back I was just in time to see him stepping into a hansom, and heard him tell the man to drive to Waterloo Station.'

'At what time was that ?'

'About half-past nine, miss.'

'Did he take any luggage ?' she asked.

'No, miss, nothing at all, except—that's to say——' the man looked doubtfully from her to Sir Peregrine. He would evidently have preferred to complete his explanation to the gentleman only, but Jane stood waiting for it.

'Go ahead,' said the baronet.

'Well, sir, that's the worst of all—I shouldn't have thought much of all the rest of it, but—he's taken his pistol with him, sir. I looked into his room after he'd gone, and thought he'd taken nothing at all with him, and then I saw the empty case. The pistol was there this morning, because I'd only been cleaning it yesterday, and had put it back last night.'

Sir Peregrine glanced apprehensively at Miss Nevil. She looked rather pale, but all she said was : 'We must make haste.'

The baronet began to feel somewhat uneasy. Had it not been for the revelation about the Benedictine, he would merely have added to his originally light-hearted view of the case the theory that the sulky young man had gone done to the country for a little target practice with his revolver. But that extravagant portation introduced a new element into the problem which it was dangerous to ignore. He pondered.

'He has gone to Waterloo station, and thence to some place on the London and South-Western line, for which a train started at—let me see—about ten o'clock. Let me look at *Bradshaw*.' He found that on opening the book at haphazard he had chanced upon a page of trains from Waterloo to the West of England.

'I should not be surprised,' he said, 'if this should prove to be the very page that Mr. Ernshaw was looking at this morning. The book has a tendency to fall open here ; that looks as if it had been held open at this place not long ago. And here's a train leaving Waterloo at ten minutes to ten ! I'm afraid we can scarcely call this a clue, but it's all the clue we have—except that confounded sonnet,' he added, and, pulling out the paper from his pocket, read the verses over with a laborious attention which their

intrinsic merits would never have gained for them. Having finished his scrutiny, he motioned to the servant to leave the room, and turning to Miss Nevil, said—

‘Mr. Ernshaw has gone to some place, on the South-Western line, which is (he says) “for ever” dark, yet moon-lit and *love-lit* in his memory. Now, Miss Nevil, can *you* suggest any place—probably in the West of England—to which that description would apply?’

‘Why, yes,’ she answered quickly—‘let me see the list of stations—yes! There is Burnt Down—the station for Burnt Moor, and it was there, on the top of the Tor, that he asked me.—He was staying with us last summer—there was a full moon, and—and—he looked at *Whitaker* to see what the moon is doing to-night,’ she added suddenly, turning to the Almanack. ‘There! March 27—the moon is just past the full. Oh, Sir Peregrine, he must be perfectly mad; let us follow him by the next train!’

‘Mad! I should think so. What else can you expect after a tumblerful of Benedictine at half-past seven? And the moon at the full, too. At any rate, this clears him of direct responsibility for the sonnet, for when the half-pint of Benedictine is in, the wit is most decidedly out. But that is the danger of the situation, for if it could make him write a sonnet like that it can make him do anything! The question is—and we’ve no means of answering it—how long will he remain mad?’ He paused for a moment, and added: ‘Yes, I agree with you. We’ll follow him by the next train to Burnt Moor—though, of course, it’s by no means certain that he has gone there.’ Sir Peregrine referred to *Bradshaw*. ‘He’ll get there at a quarter to four—it’s a slow train. How far is the Tor from the station? Five miles? Why, the moon doesn’t rise till nearly seven! He’ll have a lot of time on his hands. We’ll start at one o’clock precisely, arriving at 6.15, and be in good time to prevent him making a fool of himself—that is to say, if the effect of the potion has not worn off, for if it has I’m certain that there will be no need for our interference. Now we’ve just time to make a few arrangements. I will telegraph for some sort of a gig to take us from the station to the Tor, and I’ll have the Tor watched, so as to be on the safe side, and the local police shall keep an eye on the station, and—but I’ll tell you all I have done when we are in the train. Now you must go home at once, get some wraps, and pack up your night-gear, because we certainly sha’n’t be back till to-morrow. You’ll have to deceive your mother

a little, but of course you won't mind that! Tell her I insist on taking you down to Exmoor to choose a pony, or any other likely story that you can invent. You will have lunch with me in the train. Away with you, keep up your spirits, and be on the Waterloo platform, main line, not later than five minutes to one. I believe I was intended by nature to be a detective. I did some work of the kind when I was a young man, and the regular police did not like it at all—said I was taking the bread out of their mouths! And that,' he added thoughtfully, 'has always struck me as such a very unpleasant figure of speech.'

Sir Peregrine's arrangements, the relation of which in detail would be tedious, were made with the rapidity which invariably characterised his actions. Before he arrived at the *rendezvous* on the platform at Waterloo he had instructed his own servant and Mr. Ernshaw's to meet him there with bagfuls of necessaries, and had paid a visit to Scotland Yard, where, in an interview with a friend in high position, he briefly explained the facts of the case. From this personage he received the assurance that instructions should be sent by telegraph to the Inspector of Police at Burnt Down to look out for the arrival of Mr. Ernshaw at the station, and to keep an eye, in an unobtrusive plain-clothes way on his subsequent movements. The Inspector would also be told to station two constables near the summit of the Tor at nightfall, whose duty would be to lie in wait, and watch the proceedings of a gentleman who might be expected to repair thither; and should he display suicidal intentions, to seize, disarm, and convey him to the little local police station near the foot of the Tor, where his friends would be waiting to receive him.

On arrival at Waterloo, Sir Peregrine inquired whether any passengers had been booked for Burnt Down by the 9.50 train that morning, and was informed that one such ticket had in fact been issued; and as Burnt Down was not a place to which the London public flocked in any noticeable number, Sir Peregrine was pleased to consider that the hypothesis on which he was acting had received some of the support which it so greatly needed.

Miss Nevil and the servants were punctual in their arrival; and Sir Peregrine, who had decided that the adventure should be carried through in the presence of as few witnesses as possible, explained to the men that their further services were not needed. To Mr. Ernshaw's servant, who was evidently disappointed at being left behind, he made some encouraging remarks, and advised him

to be reticent on the subject of his master's proceedings. Jane took her place in the compartment, the baronet followed her, and the train moved out of the station. Where they were to sleep that night, and what to do with Mr. Ernshaw if they caught him, were subjects to which they had not given any consideration.

The English valet stared gloomily at the train as it drew out of sight, and, after a moment's silence, observed to his companion : 'I don't know what your opinion may be, but even if I could feel sure that Mr. Ernshaw was all right I should call this a rum go.'

Achmet, who was ignorant of the object of the journey and to whom no proceedings on the part of his master ever caused the least surprise, only smiled assentingly. Perhaps he was dimly conscious that the luxuriance of an oriental vocabulary would be inadequate to the task of summing up the situation so succinctly as to bear comparison with the Englishman's masterly monosyllables.

IV

Burnt Moor is a part of that bewilderingly tumbled assemblage of hill, valley, and plain which occupies so large a portion of the county of Devon. Few houses are visible, and but one road, which, winding up from the railway station, takes a bold curve round the base of the Tor, and stretches away across the moor like a narrow yellow ribbon. About half a mile short of the Tor this road passes a little group of cottages, one of which is distinguished by the words 'County Police' on an enamelled iron plate over the door. To this modest rallying point of law and order—which was also the abode of Mr. John Quincey, the local Inspector of Police—Sir Peregrine Brooke and Miss Jane Nevil were conveyed, on the completion of their railway journey, in one of those curiously antique waggonette-shaped vehicles which are still to be found tottering about in remote country districts.

Mr. Quincey (as appeared from a note which had been delivered to Sir Peregrine on arriving at Burnt Down Station) had done his best to carry out the instructions sent to him from London. In one particular, however, he had been unable to fulfil them. 'The gentleman from London,' as he called Mr. Ernshaw, had not arrived at Burnt Down, as anticipated, by the train of a quarter to four. The Inspector had been at first somewhat nonplussed by this unexpected alteration of programme, but an exchange of telegrams with the neighbouring stations on the line soon established the fact that the suspected stranger (described as 'tall, with dark moustache, but without luggage') had alighted

from the train at Buddleton, the station next before Burnt Down, distant some ten miles from the Tor. In consequence of this move on Mr. Ernshaw's part the Inspector had been unable to keep a watch on his movements. He learnt, however, that he had started walking from Buddleton station in the direction of the Tor, and Mr. Quincey had made the necessary arrangements for his reception there by placing two constables in hiding near the rocks at the summit.

It was cold and it was dark, though with a pale indication of approaching moonrise behind the blackness of the hill-slopes eastward, when the baronet and Miss Nevil arrived at the police station, where, being persons of manifest distinction, they were invited by Mr. Quincey into the parlour and provided with tea. The Inspector, after a brief conversation, left his guests to themselves, and walked up the road towards the Tor, 'just to see how things were going.' Sir Peregrine was pleased with Jane. The suspense of a situation which would have been farcical but for the possibility of a tragic *dénouement*, must have been painful to her, but she accepted it as a necessity and displayed no inclination to whimper. Strangely enough, she felt no fatigue. As for him, in spite of his outward cheerfulness, he was in fact somewhat perturbed at finding that Ernshaw's mad resolution had not evaporated *en route* to Devonshire. Sir Peregrine had expected that the effect of that copious draft of potent *liqueur* would have worn off during the long railway journey, and that the extravagant and erring young man would have returned with all speed to London from one of the train's many stopping-places. But it was now quite clear that he had not done so. Ernshaw's intentions, suicidal or otherwise, remained unaltered, and for safety's sake it was necessary to assume the worst. Sir Peregrine looked out of the parlour-window and saw the moon's silvery disc just clear of the hill-side. 'Could there be something, after all,' he asked himself, 'in the notion that the moon had a disturbing effect on human brains?' He turned to Jane, and said :

'Mr. Ernshaw will approach the Tor from the further side, and he should be nearly there by this time. If we had arrived at this place earlier, I would have tried to meet him on the Moor. As it is, I should be certain to miss him, whereas he can't possibly miss the Tor; it's visible for miles. I don't see what I can do; everything depends now on the promptitude of Mr. Quincey's men. But what's that?' he exclaimed suddenly.

A confused sound of steps and voices was heard approaching the house. Sir Peregrine and Jane hurried to the door.

Clear in the moonlight, on the white road, they saw the black figures of three men, walking abreast, closely followed by a fourth, whom they recognised from his voice to be Inspector Quincey. The man in the middle of the group of three was evidently acting under coercion from his companions, who held him by a wrist and a shoulder on either side. All the men were talking at the same time. The Inspector was understood to be urging the captive to restrain his wrath until he had seen the friends who were waiting for him, and 'who would explain everything.' The prisoner was denying the possibility of any friends of his being in the neighbourhood, and making forcible and uncomplimentary remarks about the imbecility of the British rural police. Sir Peregrine smiled to Jane, and said, 'What shall we do with him now that we've got him ?'

The group approached. Miss Nevil looked hard at the central figure, and exclaimed desperately: 'They've got the wrong man !'

The policemen relinquished their hold; the captive stood free. He was a good-looking youth, with no resemblance to Mr. Ernshaw, except that he bore a dark moustache.

'You hear !' he said furiously; 'you've got *the wrong man!* Why didn't you believe me ? A set of blundering idiots ! I told you it was all a mistake. I'm greatly obliged to you, madam'—he turned to Jane with a sudden change of manner. 'These fellows are enough to destroy the mildest person's equanimity. There was I, an innocent walking tourist, who had stepped up on to the Tor to see the moon rise. Before I left the top I pulled out my flask with the intention of drinking a thimbleful to keep me warm on my walk down to the station ; I was just lifting the flask to my lips, when these two chaps bounced out of hiding, knocked the flask out of my hand—it went skipping away into the quarry-holes below—and collared me. Of course I thought they were thieves, and struck out a bit—'

One of the constables pointed ruefully to a damaged eye.

'Yes, that's one comfort, at any rate. When I found they were policemen I was quiet enough. I know mistakes must occur sometimes. But what annoyed me most was the way they refused to accept my explanations : kept on saying that they had often heard that sort of story before, and insisted on bringing me here to see my friends ! Perhaps you, or you, sir—if these fellows are under your orders—can tell me what it all means. My name is Cumberbatch, St. Austin's College, Oxford. Why, I believe I might bring an action—'

'Pardon me,' interrupted Miss Nevil, 'but you say you are on a walking tour. Would you be so kind as to tell me whether you arrived this afternoon at Buddleton, on the South-Western Railway, and walked to the Tor from that station?'

'Buddleton? Certainly not! I came southward from the other side of the moor; left Pinsford this morning at nine.'

Sir Peregrine did not wait for more information. He, as well as Jane, had thought it possible that this young man was the person 'with dark moustache, but without luggage,' whose departure from Buddleton on foot had been telegraphed to Mr. Quincey. Ernshaw was still unaccounted for; the Tor unwatched.

'Send back your men to their posts as fast as they can go,' he said to the Inspector. 'Our friend is overdue, and if he has arrived already—' He broke off, and, turning to Mr. Cumberbatch, laid a hand on his arm and drew him into the parlour. The crestfallen policemen, each accusing the other of the sole responsibility for the *fiasco*, moved off in the direction of the Tor.

Mr. Cumberbatch was a gentleman; he quickly became aware that accident had led him into a situation where his presence was an embarrassment. He also realised that his unfortunate arrest had inconvenienced others as well as himself. He asked if he could be of any assistance; his offer was courteously declined, and, after a few minutes' conversation, he went on his way completely mollified, and carrying in his breast-pocket a silver flask, full of fine old French brandy, which Sir Peregrine had insisted on his accepting as a memento of the adventure, and to replace the flask which, glittering in the moonlight, had been taken for a pistol by the precipitate policemen.

Sir Peregrine and Miss Nevil stood in the road, listening to the retreating footsteps of the courteous Cumberbatch. The sound grew fainter and fainter, and soon receded out of earshot. An intense silence followed; one of those murky, vicious silences which so commonly precede a very horrible sound. Then came—not loud, for it came from the top of the Tor, half a mile away, but clear and abrupt, final as the full stop at the end of the Apocalypse—the report of a pistol.

V

Along the upper windings of the road, breathless, speechless, ran Jane Nevil; her grasp of Sir Peregrine's hand, as he raced by her side, seemed to keep her alive; fingers of ice held down her heart. Shadows, flung forward by the radiant splendour of

the moon, preceded the flying pair with incessant dancing grotesques.

A man, coming at full speed down the slope, approached, stopped with difficulty, and with difficulty found breath to ejaculate gaspingly: ‘The gentleman—your friend—he’s all right!’ That was all Mr. Quincey was able to say at the moment, but it was enough. The horror was over. Sir Peregrine and the Inspector helped Miss Nevil to reach a convenient pile of brushwood.

When further speech became possible, Mr. Quincey explained that he and his men, on their way back to the Tor, had heard the pistol-shot, and had hurried up the road and up the steep path which led from it to the summit, within a few yards of which they had met ‘the gentleman from London.’ He was coming gaily down the path, humming a tune, ‘evidently in the best of spirits,’ said Mr. Quincey, who, having no doubt of the gentleman’s identity, had wasted no time in talk, but had simply turned round and sped away to carry the news.

‘Let us walk on and meet him,’ said Jane, rising with complete self-possession from her seat by the roadside.

Before reaching the point where the path turned off from the highway, the road led them past a level patch of greensward where a party of gypsies had camped for the night. A low round-topped tent and a rickety caravan stood furthest from the road; near to them a horse was tethered. In the foreground a fire was burning brightly, and around it stood, sat, and sprawled a little group of men, women, and children. A kettle hung over the fire from an oddly shaped iron pot, and a yellow dog lay watching the flying steam. One of the women, brilliantly illuminated by the fire, as though by the footlights of a theatre, stood cutting slices from a large loaf of bread.

As the party of three approached this picturesquely disposed scene, themselves unobserved, they saw the gypsy woman suspend the cutting of her loaf and turn away towards the side of the Tor as though some sound in that direction had attracted her attention. A moment later, from the dark shadow behind the tent, emerged a figure. It was Mr. Charles Ernshaw, elegantly dressed in frock coat, grey trousers, and a top hat. He carried a neatly folded umbrella in one hand; the other was concealed behind his back. Sir Peregrine and Jane stood still for a moment, watching. He whispered: ‘What can have happened? Is it possible that he *missed himself?* Perhaps he had better not see you until I have assured myself of his sanity.’ She stood back in the shadow.

Mr. Ernshaw advanced into the full glow of the firelight, bowed to the astonished company, and, with the air of a conjurer completing his most successful performance, produced from behind his back a fine hare. Grasping it by the ears, he held it up at arm's length. A murmur of admiration arose from his audience, but at that moment the young gentleman caught sight of Sir Peregrine, who had by this time drawn near on the opposite side of the fire. Ernshaw stood for a few seconds without moving a muscle, still holding out the dangling body of the hare. Then he tossed it across the fire to one of the gypsy men, exclaiming :

'Take the *kanengro*, brother ! *Chumani to hol* for you and the *tiknos*. Oh dear, what an ass I have been !'

Sir Peregrine was not disposed to contradict the last assertion, but the fragments of Romany speech sounded agreeably in his ears ; he too had lingered in that sweet-scented woodland by-path of philology. So he waved his hand reassuringly to the young man, and, with the double aim of testing the readiness of his wits and of cautioning him against unwarily revealing the names which had hitherto been kept concealed, addressed him thus :

'*Frater, ave atque cave : nostra vera nomina celata tenere debemus.*'

Ernshaw, who had at once recognised Sir Peregrine, replied without a moment's hesitation :

'*Rectus es, amice nobilis Peregrine ! Cautus ero.*' Then, with a glance at the two policemen, who were standing by, somewhat bewildered by the curiously polyglot conversation which had passed, he added :

'*Et, quia constabularii rurales nimiam non habent gumptionem—*'

The rest of the sentence was lost in an outburst of laughter from the baronet. The yellow dog emitted a series of sharp barks, as though appreciative of Mr. Ernshaw's command of canine Latin. The two men shook hands.

'We will not bother each other now with explanations,' said Sir Peregrine. 'But there is somebody else here with whom you must make your peace. For heaven's sake, do it as quickly as possible, for we are starving, and we haven't yet decided where to dine—or sleep either.' He pointed across the road. Jane came out of the shadow into the moonlight. Ernshaw crossed over to where she stood, bent low before her, and raised her hand to his lips. Sir Peregrine turned away to talk to the gypsies.

They were urgent in their invitation to the whole party,

including (this with a twinkle in the eye) the policemen, to stay and sup off the hare. The urgent necessity of finding lodgings for the night, and—in the case of Mr. Quincey and his men—the requirements of professional etiquette, prevented the acceptance of this hospitable offer, and the Inspector proceeded to disband his forces.

Mr. Ernshaw in the meantime had made his peace with Miss Nevil by means of a series of representations which it would be impertinent and unnecessary to reproduce. He had, and did, cut a ridiculous figure; she, knowing his sensitiveness to ridicule, spared him as well as she could.

Turning to Sir Peregrine, he said: ‘I propose that for suppers and beds we go to “The Choughs” at Yeominster—it’s only half an hour by train; a capital inn, kept by a former butler of my father’s. The rascal *buttled* to such good purpose that he retired with quite a little fortune, and set up as an innkeeper in his native town. I have a suspicion, too, that he retired with some of the contents of my dear father’s cellar, because he has some excellent Steinwein in bocksbeutels—’

‘What is a “bocksbeutel?”’ asked Jane.

‘A kind of flagon, many specimens of which were in my father’s possession. But wherever it came from, I can recommend the Steinwein at “The Choughs.”’

‘Very well,’ said Sir Peregrine. ‘Of course you two will be my guests. Perhaps Mr. Quincey will be kind enough to walk on and have the waggonette brought round. There is a train to be caught.’ The party moved off down the hill, leaving the gypsies happy with a hare and a half-sovereign to the good.

VI

‘Your proceedings,’ observed Sir Peregrine to Mr. Ernshaw, as he replenished his glass with Steinwein, ‘were very like those of a person acting under hypnotic suggestion. You placed yourself voluntarily under the influence of the Benedictine—that appears, from your own account, to have been an act of pure folly. Your responsibility ended there. The result was to impress upon your over-excited brain the fixed idea of suicide. Why? It is impossible to say, for the factors in the problem are unknown. Perhaps some fantastic notions of the kind were floating in your mind just as you swallowed the liqueur, and became fixed, frozen, stereotyped, to the exclusion of all normal processes of reasoning. Perhaps it is a peculiarity of Benedictine, taken in excess,

to induce suicidal mania ; perhaps you have an inherited tendency in that direction.' Ernshaw shook his head. ' Ah, but you can't be certain. It is just in these abnormal conditions of the mind that one is apt to be dominated by a rascally group of corpuscles whose character was determined by some freakish ancestor of, say, five generations ago. Anyhow, it is clear that your mind was (temporarily I hope) deranged, and mental derangement is often accompanied by suicidal tendencies. Persons so affected not uncommonly display the most extraordinary forethought and cunning in order to achieve their *ends* ! Allow me to send for another bocksbeutel.'

Sir Peregrine and Jane had discovered that Ernshaw had no distinct recollection of anything that had happened from the moment of drinking the Benedictine up to the time when he found himself standing on the top of Burnt Tor with his pistol in his hand. When questioned concerning the sonnet, and when that atrocious specimen of versification, in his own handwriting, was placed before him, he admitted that he had a faint memory of having committed that literary offence—to paper. ' It was as if he had been reminded of some incident in a dream,' he said. His view was that he had been, in fact, in a somnambulistic, but half-conscious, state. The liqueur had acted like a magic potion ; it had left him a certain mechanical adaptability to circumstances, but had made a clean sweep of his moral responsibility, ' though that,' he added, ' you may find it hard to believe.'

' Why so ? ' said the unwary baronet. ' I have already produced a theory to account for it.'

' Because,' replied the frivolous youth, ' a *sweep* is of all things the most difficult to make clean. But seriously, I think that whether I was subject to temporary suicidal mania or not, I certainly showed a good deal of that cunning and forethought that you speak of. I must have got out at the station before Burnt Down because I had been to the other station before—last year—and I was afraid of being recognised. In fact I remember feeling all day long a kind of nightmare terror lest I should meet anyone I knew.' He paused to pour out Steinwein to Jane and himself.

' And how did you feel when you found yourself on the Tor ? ' she said.

' I felt no surprise at all. I can't explain the feeling, but it was not like waking from sleep—rather as though some thick sort of muffler had been withdrawn from my brain. I had " come to " in the same way for a minute when I was crossing the moor,

but before I could realise the situation the muffler was round me again. But I *was* surprised, and rather alarmed, when I found my pistol in my hand. I felt as if some bogey had been playing with me, and I was awfully afraid of dropping back into his clutches. I must have been standing stock-still for several minutes—struggling, as it were, against the bogey—when I noticed that luckless hare sitting on his haunches in the moonlight, out of range I fancied. However, by a sudden impulse I raised the pistol and let fly at him. I never did any poaching in my life before ; the game you get in that way is rarely worth the scandal ! Nevertheless I brought him down, and the charm was broken. I was myself again, and there was one March hare the less on Burnt Tor. Kindly pass the bottle.'

'And now,' said Sir Peregrine, 'let us for the moment say no more about your aberrations, and consider our future policy.'

'I have already telegraphed to my man to say that I am all right. He is discreet. We will return to town by an early train to-morrow, and I'll concoct some fable to account for my absence from the office. That will be easy enough ; I have done it before.'

'I mean that you should consider your position with regard to Miss Nevil.'

A smile passed between the two young people.

'Why,' said Jane, 'we settled all that when you were talking to your gypsy friends on the Tor.'

'The deuce you did !' exclaimed the baronet.

'Yes,' said Ernshaw, 'we are going to announce our engagement in the *Morning Post*, and intend to get married as soon as a reasonable number of presents have come in.'

'The deuce you do ! And without asking my consent ? I'm not sure that you ought ever to marry with a record of criminal lunacy behind you ; why, it was not only your life that was in danger, for even after escaping your own pistol you might have been carried off to gaol or to an asylum.'

'I have been told,' said Ernshaw, with apparent seriousness, 'that a man doesn't know what real comfort is until he has tried living in a padded room. Just think—what luxury ! The walls, the very floor itself, all padded ! And as for going to prison, have you ever considered what an admirable vehicle that is which is known by the name of *Black Maria* ? How dexterously it contrives to combine the privacy of the bathing-machine with the democratic universality of the omnibus ?' Sir Peregrine checked the flow of levity with a question to Jane :

'But will your mother agree? And how shall you persuade her to discard that fellow with the barley-sugar legs—Mr. Topham?'

'Topham,' put in Ernshaw abruptly, 'may go to the De-Deccan, or any other distant land, and remain there! I beg your pardon, my dear Jane, but the mere mention of the man's name is inexpressibly galling to me! I can't tell you, Sir Peregrine, what I—and Jane—have suffered from him. He is a prig of the most boresome description. Just think, he once insisted on reading aloud to us from a collection of platitudes which he very properly calls his "commonplace book." And he has written a play called *Queen Anne*—*The Queen Anne*, you know—in which, I believe, he informs the world of her decease! Another bocks-beutel, if you please, waiter.'

'It is quite true,' said Jane. 'He has a dreadful lot of money, you know, and the extracts that he read to us were mostly about what he called "*the serious responsibilities attaching to the possession of wealth.*" He was horribly solemn about it.'

'What nonsense!' said the baronet. 'Look at me. Here I am, as rich as Crœsus, and as jolly as a sandboy—whatever that may be. But as for his play, I don't think that you, Ernshaw, are quite in a position to indulge in literary criticism, after this specimen of your own compositions—he pointed to the sonnet, which lay beside him on the table.

Ernshaw snatched it up and tore it into fragments.

'It's no use, my boy,' said Sir Peregrine, 'Miss Nevil and I have every word of it by heart. Why, we gave it the same sort of attention which a German commentator gives to a sonnet of Shakespeare's. However, I must admit that it showed some acquaintance with English literature, though perverted to a base use. With regard to Amos, I find it hard to believe that Mrs. Nevil can want him for a son-in-law.'

'I don't care a bit whether she does or not,' said naughty Jane.

'But we must try not to annoy her, if we can possibly help it. It would spoil the party. I think,' Sir Peregrine went on deliberately, 'I can suggest a plan which will smooth away all difficulties—that is, if you will agree to it. I will make you my heiress.' Seeing their astonished faces, he added: 'Not my *sole* heiress, you know; I have about a dozen of 'em already. It is one of my notions as to the responsibilities attaching to the possession of wealth.'

The two looked confusedly at him and at each other. He proceeded :

' My system is, that my heirs and heiresses start inheriting at once. You see, I've not the least intention of dying, and I can't understand why a ridiculous convention, which ought not to exist between friends, should prevent me from doing them a service until I am occupied in quiring to the young-eyed cherubim (or otherwise) and possibly unable to get any amusement out of my bequests. My motives are to a great extent selfish ones. Besides, the amounts are not large : merely a competence. Catch me cutting down my own expenditure ! So say the word, and I will go and propitiate the fates (my solicitors, Messrs. Stokoe, Lancaster and Antrobus, of Moira Place) the day after we arrive in town.'

Miss Nevil was ready to say the word without demur. But it took a good half-hour's argument, and repeated applications of Steinwein, to extort Mr. Ernshaw's consent.

' Not that your consent is at all necessary,' said Sir Peregrine to him. ' Only I don't want to spoil the party. And remember —a word from me, and your proceedings to-day will be the talk of the town ! '

The poor young man murmured something about the humiliation of being a pensioner.

' You, my dear Ernshaw, will get nothing out of me except (if you are a good boy) whatever help I can give you in your profession. Your wife will have a little dowry, instead of none—that is all. And she and I are not going to be deprived of our legitimate amusements because of the ridiculous scruples (pardon me if I speak too plainly) of a hare-brained——'

Mr. Ernshaw's resistance collapsed.

' There is one point on which I must insist,' said Sir Peregrine, ' and that is, that from this day forward you become a total abstainer—from Benedictine, and I should like to add from sonnets also, unless you wish to bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to the Woking Crematorium ! That is understood ? Very well.'

He turned to Miss Nevil, and addressing her for the first time by her Christian name, remarked : ' My dear Jane, the Steinwein stands with you.'

CHARLES STRACHEY.

Epping Forest.

IT is now twenty years since the Act of Sir Selwyn Ibbetson was passed, and Epping Forest was formally made over to the public for ever 'as an open space for recreation and enjoyment.' The passions which were aroused by the angry controversy and costly litigation preceding this event have now cooled down. All agree that Epping Forest has proved a boon of priceless value to its new owners, and particularly to the hard-working population of the East End. On a holiday the poorest dock labourer has an estate to which he can be transported at the cost of a few coppers, and where he can refresh himself with pure air and exercise and with the sights and sounds of nature. That he thoroughly appreciates the advantage is best proved by the following figures, kindly supplied to the writer by the Secretary of the Great Eastern Railway. Last year (1897) the number of passengers conveyed to the various stations on Epping Forest on the four holidays were as follows: Easter Monday (April 19), 42,864; Whit Monday (June 7), 51,356; Jubilee Day (June 22), 37,300; August Bank Holiday (August 2), 54,395.

The total, it will be observed, is, in round numbers, 186,000. But this does not represent the whole of the visitors. Anyone stationing himself on the beautiful road that runs (with forest on either side) from Whipp's Cross to Woodford will see a strange procession of vehicles streaming from town in the morning and back at night; carts, gigs, delivery vans, omnibuses, coaches, donkey carts, every kind or variety of conveyance that may be owned or hired; they are all crowded with men, women, and children. The holiday-makers do not 'take their pleasures sadly'; on the contrary, they adopt every known device for quickening gaiety. They sing those merry songs that delight the music-hall audiences of Poplar and Whitechapel; whoever has a concertina or a clarionet or any other wind instrument brings it and blows—music, I was going to write, but forbear. The Bank Holiday crowd

is not calculated to please fastidious eyes or ears, yet no one who thinks of the real change and health-giving enjoyment, the occasion offers those who have little of either in their lives, will do more than smile at the odd forms in which pleasure is expressed. There is little that is really wrong in the conduct of the excursionists. At the end of the day 'the last load whoam' may consist of a few excursionists not quite so well-behaved and sober as they were at starting, but every competent observer will admit that the tendency of the holiday-makers is to go in less every succeeding year for drink and rowdyism, and more for innocent amusement. In fact, if all things be taken into consideration—their usual surroundings, the change and relaxation, the stimulation of company, and the temptations on the way—it must be admitted that their behaviour is very good indeed.

All the same, they have their own way of 'taking the pleasure of the country.' There are high fliers and merry-go-rounds, and steam bicycles running to the music of steam hurdy-gurdies, and donkeys and ponies and 'koker-nut' shies—which delight them more than green thicket or bosky glade. A good thing, too! If fifty thousand East-enders took to investigating the woodland recesses, what a time the deer would have of it! In point of fact, one may walk the more secluded and beautiful parts of the forest without seeing any sign of the crowd, with nothing to prove its presence except 'its long withdrawing roar' and the noise of musical instruments, which is by no means disagreeable when softened and mellowed by distance. And, after all, the main point is being achieved, since the merry-makers, whether they rollick on a donkey's back or are tossed to the tree-tops in what Scotch children call 'shuggy-boats,' are drawing in a supply of the wholesome woodland air, 'worth sixpence a pint,' as somebody remarked of Lord Tennyson's downs. I rather like to walk in the Forest at the close of such a day, especially if it be in May or June. The silver moon is not so bright as to disclose the empty bottles and sandwich-papers strewed by the visitors. Nightingales that one expected to have been terrified from their haunts flute their rich deep songs from bushes close to the caravan and merry-go-round, and the Forest resumes its peace and calm, just as if there had been no human disturbers. From a distance do, indeed, come many incongruous sounds—drunken human voices, concertinas out of tune, cornets tipsily blown; but they only seem to remind us that ugliness and discord and squalor, as well as beauty and passion, harmonise into

life, which includes the stars as well as the barrel-organ, the nightingale as well as the coster and his 'donah.'

After all, however, there are only three Bank Holidays in the year (Christmas does not count much in the Forest), and two are often wet. On every fine day from June to September a private trip of some kind arrives: now the beanfeast of a factory or the 'wayzgoose' of 'a chapel'—a printers' chapel, I mean; most frequently of all a band of school-children. It would be difficult to imagine a more suitable place for such excursions; here is water to row in, wide spaces for games and pastime, shady groves for summer picnics, and woodland paths on which to ramble. There are very few country children who enjoy equal advantages. Epping Forest is an estate of considerable size, containing as it does 5,500 acres of mixed open and woodland. It has been the aim of those who manage it to reproduce as far as possible the former wild conditions. At the time when Mr. Shaw Lefevre and others took the matter in hand it was being utterly destroyed. The right of lopping had been so vigorously exercised that, except in one or two groves, every tree had been decapitated. Some people profess to discover a sort of beauty in the distorted shapes assumed by the pollards—especially the hornbeams—after this treatment, but a natural taste will scarcely admit it. A typical Forest pollard is a gnarled and empty shell, with a crown full of mouldering dust, and perhaps a honeysuckle or a briar growing out of it with long, trailing vines, while generally a draping of ivy half conceals the trunk. Give Nature time, and she will make anything picturesque; but a natural tree is still the more beautiful, whether shooting up tall and straight among its Forest companions, or stretching out giant limbs in the solitude of a hedge-row. Yet again Nature finds many uses even for the pollards. In their chinks and crevices myriads of the great and blue tits—as numerous here as sparrows in the streets of London—find nesting places. The squirrels, if surprised in their frequent quests on the ground, pop into the larger holes, and wait till the coast is clear and they can scramble back to the higher trees, where alone they are safe. In the crowns many wild duck nest; during the breeding season one often sees the brown mother racing away from her nest at a speed that seems quite incompatible with her dumpy body and short legs. Not infrequently, too, Reynard chooses one for his *siesta*, and sleeps heedless of the passers-by, unless some enterprising schoolboy should climb up and disturb him. The pollard, too, is a kind of natural flowerpot. By the rains of winter

the wood in course of time is rotted into a most fertile mould ; you can pour it out of the more aged when they are felled. Seeds of creeper and bush and fern, if carried to it by winds or birds, germinate freely ; trailing boughs and green plants therefore draw their sustenance from the crumbling trunk. Close to High Beech is one such stump twelve or fourteen feet high, and itself long dead, and grey, and mossy. Out of the crown, as from a cup, grows a handsome holly-bush, considerably larger than an ordinary Christmas-tree. No doubt, too, these rotting pollards are favourable to insect life. One winter day I saw a couple of workmen take no fewer than sixteen of the large and handsome caterpillars of the goat-moth from an old willow they were breaking up. They were offering to sell them at fourpence apiece, but did not seem aware that already some of the boy-collectors had been doing a little breaking-up on their own account, and were amply supplied with specimens. Indeed, those youths know well how rich the woodland is in moth and butterfly, and may be seen on summer holidays roaming far and near armed with net and poison-bottle. As it happens, Mr. Cole, curator of the recently established museum at Chingford, is a keen entomologist, and has got together an admirable and well-mounted collection, so that the young student is greatly helped to name and identify his specimens. In time perhaps we shall see an equally good representation of the birds, nests, eggs, reptiles, beasts, and plants of the Forest, as a well-equipped museum affords the most effective help to the study of natural history.

Another service performed by the pollards is that of affording sleeping-places to the birds. To come down through the wood just as the darkness of a winter night is gathering is the best time for watching them all retire to rest. A great babbling and twittering comes from groves of holly and hawthorn, as if the sparrows were scrambling for perches. They retire earlier than the missel-thrush, which is still whistling his loud, strong song from the topmost branch of a leafless tree, while blackbirds are scolding one another in the hawthorn cover. Sometimes one will fly out, looking a little confused and terrified in the dusk. The bullfinch often chooses a bush quite close to the road, and, getting to the very centre, sticks out his feathers as a protection against the cold, and with his head under his wing makes a strange little huddled-up mass, his bright colours hardly showing in the dim light. But let me walk ever so softly past the old pollards after dark, and the light-sleeping inmates—wrens and tits, I fancy—

though it is always too late to identify them, fly out, often into my very face, the warm soft feathers making no unpleasant impact against the skin. A deep hush steals over the trees at last, the chirruping voices are no longer heard, and only the rustling of dead leaves and the scamper of small feet tell that the life of night is awake—that the stoat, the weasel, and the rat are busy and coursing after their victims. Finally, the king of the Forest trees is a pollard, a grand oak twenty-two feet in circumference, standing beside Fairmead Lodge.

But, after all has been said, the most beautiful woodland scenery is at High Beech and Monk Wood, where the trees are of natural growth. They were seen at their best in the autumn of 1897, when the season made one of those slow and stately revolutions that exhibit every gradation of colour: first the deep green of summer, with the sunlight only breaking through in spots and bars; next, a glowing bronze, with red leaves fluttering softly down to the earth, kept bare by the shallow roots of the trees; finally, stripped boughs rising from a russet carpet, and the winter sun like a blazing fire seen through the branches. It is pleasant to watch buds expanding and breaking into leaf, equally pleasant to rest in a shady grove during summer, or to note the changing colours of autumn; but in winter alone is it possible to see the full beauty of forest trees, the noble stem or central pillar, the bold fine limbs flung heavenward, the exquisite tracery made by the branching summit against the sky.

Even those who do not subscribe to this austere doctrine, who love colour and ornament, blossoms and green leaves, and the sparkle of sunshine, more than form, will find it interesting to sit on some old tree-trunk under the beeches late in autumn. The mast tempts the shyest woodlanders. Little squirrels, with their tails over their heads, clamber down the trunks, and, after assuring themselves there is no danger, begin turning the leaves over for nuts. They have quite a large vocabulary, a curious sound between a low squeal and a cough, that they give with a jerk of the body when they eat and also as they leap about on the trees; a bark or wough when suddenly alarmed; a shrill chatter, almost as sharp and clear as a bird's, when conversing among themselves. At one time they were nearly extirpated, but are very plentiful now in the forest.

Not far off a gorgeous cock pheasant steals from an adjacent corner of withering fern and has a feast to himself. This bird, I think, exists in the right numbers. His bed-going croak is one

of the familiar sounds of dusk, yet one never finds more than two in company, and only a few broods are reared annually. More would but tempt the poacher, and there are enough to lend variety to the bird-life. The partridge, of course, loves the ploughed field more than the grove, but a few come to the open spaces and may occasionally be seen even in the deepest part of the forest.

Another bird that comes for mast is the jay, of which the forest breeds myriads. Its discordant croak seems to belong to the nature of the place, like the tinkle of cow-bells and the eternal chatter of tits. The magpie, on the other hand, which has similar habits and lives on practically the same food, is seldom to be seen. Six or seven years ago there were several walks on which one was almost certain to see a magpie or two; the appearance of one now has come to be a very great rarity indeed. Mr. E. N. Buxton says that two broods were reared last year on the outskirts of the forest, but they are never visible within. Every lover of birds must regret this. The magpie is more beautiful in form and much more graceful in flight than the ill-balanced, awkward-flying jay. One reason for its disappearance may be that the magpie builds a more conspicuous and easily robbed nest than the jay, which prefers the impenetrable thicket for its home. But, on the other hand, it is difficult to say why one species thrives and another dwindles. On the forest ponds, for instance, waterhens and ducks are in tremendous force. They are found wherever there is water; but the stronghold of the former is Highams Lake, where it is pretty to watch them in the breeding season, when the pond is white with water-lilies. The long-legged mothers look quite comical as they straggle over the broad green floating leaves, picking the insects and followed by their dusky chicks. But the bolder and greedier ducks prefer Connaught Water, where they follow the boats and gobble up the crumbled bread and biscuit freely tossed to them by the occupants. They are as tame as barn-door fowls here, though as difficult to shoot as ever when once they cross the boundary of the forest, and even when they return from their wanderings at dusk fly round and round as suspiciously as if they dreaded a decoy or a punt gun. It seems very remarkable that the coot should be rapidly diminishing as these increase in numbers. The same thing has happened in waters that used to be familiar to me as a boy. At that time the 'bell-pot' was as familiar as the waterhen, and, though it can scarcely be said to have become absolutely rare, it has ceased to be common. Yet it is not shot or

persecuted in any way, the sedge-margined water is less frequented than it used to be, and there seems to be no good reason why the coot should not increase and multiply.

While on this subject I may say that birds of prey take little advantage of the asylum or sanctuary offered them in Epping Forest. There are a few kestrels and sparrowhawks, but no great number, and the rest of the falconidæ only occur as rare visitors. Wood-owls are occasionally seen and heard, but they are not in anything like the number that might have been expected. Yet the small creatures on which they feed—rats, mice, moles, shrews, voles, insects, and small birds—are in abundant numbers, especially the mole, which may be seen working any day. One afternoon I witnessed a fierce battle between two of them. Like Falstaff, they ‘fought a good hour by Shrewsbury clock,’ worrying at one another’s throats like bull-dogs. They rather justified the expression ‘as blind as a mole,’ for when they got ‘out of grips’ each seemed to find a difficulty in rediscovering its antagonist. It is said that there are long-eared owls in the Forest, but I have not come across one, and the barn-owl is very rare. They are infrequently seen, and a close search is never required where owls are in large numbers, for they *will* venture out by daylight and get themselves mobbed by small birds who make a racket that soon announces what has happened.

Thanks again to the many-creviced pollard one night-loving creature, the little bat, is nearly as common and plentiful as the sparrow. I saw one hunting about on the evening of January 13 of this year—a very early date and a testimony to the mildness of the winter. When searching rotten tree-trunks for caterpillars boys often get whole families crowded up in a corner. They are not very difficult to tame.

I have not left much space for the quadrupeds. Undoubtedly the finest beasts of the Forest are the fallow and roe deer; it is a question whether they are not too numerous for the quantity of food. They used to be so extremely wild that many frequenters of the Forest were sceptical of their existence; but quite recently they have become as tame as sheep, and will scarcely run a dozen yards when startled. Moreover, they have spread to parts where they were scarcely ever seen before. A herd numbering from three or four to eighteen or twenty is to be met with close to Chingford station, in the cover adjoining the ‘Woodman.’ They did not use to venture south of High Beech. I am afraid that what has tamed them is hunger. Be it remembered, the com-

moners' rights are exercised to the full. The grass is kept down on the plains by cows, horses, and donkeys, till one is puzzled to see how they can get a bite. Wherever there is cover rabbits have multiplied to an inordinate extent, and these creatures do not leave much for anything that comes after. I do not like to imagine that the deer are half-starved, and yet it puzzles me to see how they can get enough in winter.

The most obviously thriving and multiplying quadrupeds are the rabbit and the squirrel. Hares occasionally make their form in the heather or fern, and may be seen limping down the rides at dusk. The small carnivora are as plentiful as might be expected where vermin are protected as much as game. Stoats and weasels are the most common; they may be seen any day hunting the rabbits round Connaught Water. So far the rarer marten and pole-cat have not been tempted back to their old haunts. Foxes are occasionally to be seen; they come on hunting expeditions from the surrounding country, and when gorged with rabbit curl themselves up to sleep. Mr. Buxton introduced a few pairs of badgers ten or twelve years ago, and they have bred and prospered. Rats, mice, moles, and 'such small deer' have a happy time of it in the woods.

Boy naturalists who in spring search the ponds and pools for 'fearful ewefetes' seldom return with empty jars, but the girls who with their teachers come botanising are often disappointed. All but the commonest wild flowers are disappearing; not only do the urchins pluck them, but the vendors who go about the suburbs offering roots and flowers for sale carry them off wholesale. The primrose has in this way been practically cleared out of the Forest, so has the once common Solomon's seal; and the fox-glove and others are very nearly extinct. If the anemones, blue-bells, and violets still survive, it is only owing to the fact that they grow in such astonishing numbers that the armfuls carried away make no difference. The wild rose, too, in all its varieties flourishes so well on the clay soil that it cannot be destroyed by plucking. So does the hawthorn, and the bramble thickets yield a crop of blackberries large enough to provide some for the countless numbers who come gathering. In this poor man's estate therefore is as yet no lack of variety.

P. ANDERSON GRAHAM.

Sunia : a Himalayan Idyll.

I.

'O very woman—god at once and child !'

THE pearly glimmer of dawn was over the mountains, and the far-off snows looked indescribably pale and pure against the dove-like tones of the sky. Away, across the valley, Kalatope ridge, serrated and majestic of outline, made an incident of massive shadow amid the tenderer tints around.

A Himalayan dawn is brief as it is beautiful: and now, sudden and swift as magic, the full splendour of morning flashed along the sky. Rapier-like shafts of light pierced the purple lengths of shadow which lay along the deeper ravines and engulfed the still slumbering valley. They threaded their golden way through the sombre, level pine boughs of Kalatope forest, and stretched out all their radiant length along the narrow verandah of a low wooden bungalow that stood alone in the very heart of this silent, smiling mountain world. In this same verandah a solitary Englishman sat, peeling plantains and drinking tea, in full view of the valley and the brightening east. From time to time his eyes rested upon the magnificent scene before him with the quiet satisfaction of one who looks upon the familiar face of a friend; for, under the high-sounding title of Deputy Conservator of Government Forests, Phil Brodie reigned sole monarch of this his arboreal paradise—a peaceful and eminently satisfactory form of kingship.

Having demolished his last plantain, he rose and sauntered toward the low wooden railing, hat in hand. He was a long, lean man of sportsmanlike build, though the face—sallow, serious, and self-contained, with a suspicion of cynicism about the mouth—suggested possibilities of cultured thought and feeling.

Anon, as he stood thus, his keen eyes brightened curiously, and not without good reason, for from out the black mass of pine and deodar to his right the figure of a young girl emerged, and

neared the hut with swift, elastic step. Dress, face, and carriage proclaimed her a child of the Himalayas—a child-woman, such as the East alone can beget.

When a Hill girl is beautiful, you will scarce find her match in the five continents; and Sunia was beautiful past question. For full eighteen months, morning after morning, Brodie had watched her approach him thus, bearing on her head his daily tribute of fruit and flowers, yet did her beauty still take him by surprise and demand a reiterated recognition of its rare quality. There were evil moments, of course, when he realised with a pang that in five years' time she would be coarse and commonplace, and in ten a wrinkled hag. But, be that as it might, at the present moment she was incomparable—and she did not know it! Therein lay the miracle.

The face was a pure oval, with smooth, egg-like curves of cheek and chin, and eyes of that rare pale brown which is only found among true Hill folk, and that none too frequently. A flower-like silver ornament in one of her delicate nostrils seemed set there with coquettish intent to accentuate its exquisitely tender curves. The soft fulness of her lips suggested passionate possibilities, and the scarlet of betel-nut upon them made an enchanting incident of colour amid the dusky tints of her face and dress. This latter was of woollen homespun, a few shades darker than her skin. The graceless, close-fitting ‘pyjamas’ were atoned for and partially concealed by a rough brown tunic, bound about the waist with smooth black coils of twisted goat’s hair and fastened loosely across her breast with a silver pin. Around her brown throat she wore a narrow necklet of goat’s hair strung with quaintly fashioned lumps of raw turquoise, onyx, and amber, and from the midst of these hung a grotesquely patterned plaque of hammered silver. Her small ears drooped with tinkling silver trinkets, and bangles and anklets of glass and silver clinked musically as she walked.

A round, flat basket, piled conically with garden produce, rested without support upon her close-fitting cap of yellow cotton, from beneath which her hair fell in one long braid, almost to her knees. The Eternal Feminine is one and the same the wide world over, and it is humiliating to reflect that two-thirds of this same braid—its wearer’s dearest bit of vanity—had in all probability been borrowed from the back of a mountain goat.

With a gracious sweep of two faultless arms, Sunia uncrowned

herself and laid her *dáli* at Brodie's feet, then lowered her fair forehead thrice to the very ground.

'Live for ever, Lord of my Life!' she murmured. The conventional greeting was uttered with passionate fervour.

Brodie stooped and lightly touched the quaint assortment of almonds, walnuts, and early vegetables, around which were set with scrupulous symmetry alternate clumps of blood-red rhododendron blossoms and of the first wild white roses of the year. Selecting one of these last, he put it into his coat with great deliberation.

'Roses, Sunia?' he said, speaking the soft Hill dialect as musically as the girl herself. 'Thou hast assuredly been far afoot to procure so fine a sheaf of blossoms?'

She stood before him now slim and upright as the young pines all about her, and a sudden warm flush showed dimly beneath her olive skin.

'What matter how far, so my lord be well pleased?' she made answer with veiled eyes. 'Away there, down in the valley, they were scattered abroad like stars of silver; and I said within my heart, their shining will make beautiful the Huzoor's house; and what should this slave live for save to give pleasure to my lord? Were it not well that I should bear them now to Dhunnu that they faint not for lack of water?'

Brodie inclined his head in silent assent. Then, with eyes averted, and a smile half quizzical, half tender, he noted how she hastily plucked two roses from the self-same bunch as his own and set them, Hill-fashion, just above her small pink ear. That done, she abased herself once more to the very ground, took up her burden, and departed with much delicate jingling of anklet and armlet.

Brodie watched her reflectively till she passed out of sight. 'She's a queer child,' he mused. 'Shows her gratitude, though, in the prettiest fashion.'

He raised the lapel of his coat and glanced down at the wild white blossom, whose fragrance filled his nostrils, with a curious softening of his keen eyes.

'She must have tramped for miles to get all those,' was the thought in his mind. 'And for eighteen months she has slaved for me, of her own free will, without payment of any sort. The puzzle is—what does it all mean? One can call it gratitude, of course. It is more seemly; and saves analysis. But some-

times—I begin to be afraid—Bah! I'm a conceited ass, making a mountain of tragedy out of a very prosaic molehill.'

Nevertheless, a vision of Sunia selecting the two blossoms nearest his own, and of the tell-tale blush which had accompanied the act, forced itself again and yet again upon Brodie's mind that morning and set him puzzling anew. For, without being unduly hampered by the shackles of conventional morality, Brodie favoured 'fair play'; even when the only other factor in the game had the misfortune to be a woman. It irked him to think that, by some inadvertent overflow of kindliness on his part, he might, perchance, have sown in Sunia's passionate Oriental heart the seedling of a hope that could bear only bitter fruit.

Briefly, this somewhat perplexing relationship between Pure Passion and Cultured Cynicism had come to pass in this wise.

Eighteen months previously, Brodie, whilst 'shikarring' bear among the lower Chamba hills, had been flung into the arms, as it were, of a pitiful little domestic tragedy wherein he had found himself cast for the part of the warrior-prince who arrives in the nick of time.

The scene was vividly imprinted upon his memory; still more vividly, perhaps, on hers. A small, tawny figure at the roadside, crouching beneath a beetling granite boulder, and, not fifty yards off, the huge shaggy form of a bear, which came on with shuffling, swaying gait, and a low snarling sound, gruesome to hear. Brodie deliberately covered the brute's heart and fired . . . with fatal effect. Then, whilst his men made haste to secure the prize, he had found himself brought to a standstill by two brown arms, that clung about his boots, whilst a voice from the earth blessed him fervently and fulsomely after the fashion of the East. Stooping, he had raised the girl to her feet, with reassuring words, and, in so doing, had looked upon Sunia's face for the first time—a sensation no man would ever be likely to forget.

From that day forward the girl had attached herself to his establishment; steadily refusing to give any information as to the whereabouts of her native village; working vigorously and zealously, as only a Hill woman can work; and scoffing at the notion of payment in any form.

In course of time it transpired that her mother had been out with her cutting wood at the time; but, in her abject terror at sight of the bear, had lost her foothold on the narrow path and been hurled to instantaneous death in the boulder-strewn gorge below. Further personal history Sunia had none to relate; or,

rather, none that she chose to relate. With a captivating mixture of dignity and obstinacy she merely reiterated her intention of remaining with her 'Heaven-born,' the 'Preserver of her life,' and of serving him so long as her fingers could bind a faggot or wield an axe. And he had not been man could he have said her nay.

Dhunnu, *máli*, a one-eyed, ape-like old gentleman of irreproachable lineage, had been induced, by the prospect of a monthly *backshish*, to receive the new-comer under his own roof, as one of his household. A small patch of garden-ground had been handed over to her care, and its tillage had become for her almost a religious rite. Every flower and vegetable reared thereon had been laid in her *dáli*—a self-imposed tribute of gratitude—at Brodie's feet. He, himself, had not failed to note these manifold dumb expressions of devotion; at first with a tolerant amusement, which had gradually given place to a lurking tenderness, duly tempered by cynicism, and a characteristic reluctance to take his own, or anyone else's, emotions too seriously. But when an Englishman chances to encounter Oriental passion, in all its pristine simplicity and strength, he is fairly compelled to take it seriously, whether he will or no. Brodie was just beginning to be aware of this fact, and the discovery made him feel not a little anxious and uncomfortable.

There were others also who were growing daily more anxious on Sunia's account. These were the one-eyed *máli*, and Mai Râdha, his gaunt and grizzled wife, for they had knowledge of which Brodie dreamed not.

They knew of a treasured box of withered flowers, to which one or two were added daily. The box had once held a hundred Havannahs, and had lived on Brodie's office-table. They knew of long night-watches spent in stringing scented wreaths of golden marigolds, and white, waxen 'champa' blossoms; of secret flittings, in the first pale glimmer of morning, to the tiny hamlet that clung to the steep hillside some two hundred feet below. They knew, moreover, that Sunia's wreaths—yea, and even fruit and flowers from her own cherished garden—were destined for the 'Mundar,' or shrine of Kala Devi, the dread goddess of whom every pious Hindoo stands in holy awe; and Mai Râdha's soul waxed wrathful within her at the knowledge.

'Truly it is fool's talk, and shameful,' said she to her less aggressive spouse, 'that a maid, young and good to look upon, should do this thing. Are there not men without number of our own *ját*, who would give rupees in plenty for so fair a chattel?

A true Rajpoot, with a face as radiant as the morning! And we are old, thou and I, and I had looked that from this girl's dower we should purchase rest in our old age. Lo, this two years have I been to her as a mother, and the ingrate rewards me thus! Were it not meet that thou shouldest speak to the Sahib of this foolishness?

But Dhunnu was a chicken-hearted little man, and at this startling proposition he turned his two hands about in expressive native fashion.

'Na, na, valiant one, I love not to thrust my head betwixt a lion's teeth. Speak thou, if thou art minded to.'

And Mai Râdha did speak, fluently and to the point, not to Brodie, for even she dared scarce go such a length, but to the delinquent herself.

She reaped small reward for her labour. Sunia—her wonderful eyes ablaze, her small hands clenched so that the knuckles stood out sharp and white—gave her back eloquence for eloquence, good measure, well pressed down.

'What sayest thou of the shame that a maid should live unwed? Nay, I tell thee it is thou, grey-headed though thou be, that talkest shameful talk, and I will not hear it, for I am none of thine!'

'*Ai tobah!* but these be brave words, insolent, from one who hath eaten of my salt these many months,' the elder woman retorted in shrill wrath.

'Nay, not one grain of thine have I eaten, oh Mai Râdha. Thou hast forgotten surely whence came the rupees. What! And should I take to myself a man? I, who own but one lord of my life, and my body, and my heart! I, who would even now be dust as is my mother, but for the strength of his right arm! And yet thou canst prate to me of men-folk! Betrothed was I, long since, to a son of mine own people; but now am I my lord's slave, and none other's, till I die—till I die!'

Her soft lips quivered a little over the last words, and two gleaming tear-drops hung upon her thick lashes.

But Mai Râdha had eyes for none of these things. She was a woman, and old, and this girl stood between her and the money her lean fingers Itched to hold. Wherefore she spoke harshly, as before.

'Oh fool, and blind! This thy lord whom thou worshippest hath no thought of thee in his mind. It is ever so with these English. They are stone-hearts all. For, as the wind blows, and

the water flows, so kind calls to kind, and he will assuredly take to wife some bold white "Miss," with hair like the sunshine and eyes like the noonday sky, and what will be thy portion then, O thrifless one ?'

A dull grey pallor creeping slowly over the girl's clear skin told how the thrust had gone home. But her lips were steady now, and the eyes dry and bright.

'There is always—Death,' she made answer slowly. 'Mai Kali must needs accept my life at my hands, if none other offering availeth.'

Phil Brodie, seated within at his office table, his mind deep in the intricacies of an official report, had no knowledge either of Mai Râdha's vicious prophecies, or of Sunia's secret prayers. Only at his side, in a wineglass of water, bloomed the wild white rose of the morning, fresh and fragrant still. He could scarcely tell what had prompted his desire to preserve it; nor did he trouble himself to search out the reason for so unwonted a freak of senti-
ment.

Sunia, on the other hand, had no knowledge of the rose on Brodie's table; so that she went heavily for many days, a haunting fear at her heart, a ceaseless prayer upon her lips. Also she redoubled her offerings at the 'Mundar' of Kala Devi, who, being herself a woman, must surely understand, and hear.

II.

Love, that keeps all the choir of lives in chime;
Love, that is blood within the veins of time!

But prayers and votive offerings failed to avert the decree of Fate. Mai Kali was deaf, or hard of heart in those days; or, maybe, she was busy with the affairs of wealthier folk. For lo, as June was drawing to a close, and the patient pines were sighing for the summer rain, there came to the hut on the hill-top the 'white Miss' of Mai Râdha's prophecy, 'with hair like the sunshine and eyes like the noonday sky.' And Sunia's heart within her dried up like an autumn leaf; for she knew that her hour had come.

In prosaic Western terms the fateful event may be set down as follows:

Edith Lindon, escorted by her brother and by a certain Colonel Polden of Brodie's acquaintance, had been riding Dalhousie-ward one sultry afternoon, on their return from the yearly race-meeting

at Kajiar. They were hot and thirsty ; for they had ridden eight miles, and the air, even at that height, was heavy with the coming monsoon. Colonel Polden suggested a raid on Brodie's hut, with a view to obtaining rest and refreshment—a proposition to which his companions assented cheerfully. On the road thither the Colonel, by way of entertaining Miss Lindon, indulged in a rhapsodical word-picture, half quizzical, half sincere, of Brodie's 'bewitching little Hill Beauty.'

'Saved her from the embraces of an amorous bear, winter before last,' he wound up. 'And she's served him for love ever since. A very pretty little woodland romance, isn't it ?'

'Charmingly pretty. But you must be sure and persuade your friend to let us see the girl. Perhaps he might let me make a sketch of her. I should like that above all things. I'm making a collection of Indian figure sketches to take home, and the Hill costume is so very picturesque.' If Sunia could but have heard her !

She saw her, however, which was perhaps more than enough in the way of anguish. Crouching in the warm odorous shade of a group of deodars, she saw Brodie lift the fair girl from her saddle ; saw her yellow hair flash in the level stream of sunlight ; saw the blue eyes, clear and shadowless—the magic pink and white of the soft round face. Then she glanced down at her own brown, shapely hands, and shuddered. 'Mai Râdha spoke true talk,' she whispered. 'I have been a fool, and blind—blind !'

But, though the sight hurt her straining eyes, though the tinkling laughter from the verandah made her wince and shiver, she stirred neither hand nor foot, but continued to look and listen with feverish eagerness.

Tea was served in the verandah. A typical Khansamah's tea. Rockingham tea-pot, with damaged spout ; plush tea-cosy ; hideous slabs of cake, and a plate of *meta biscoot*, which, being interpreted, signifies 'mixed biscuits' ! The 'bold white Miss' presided over the tea-pot with as much ease and freedom as though she were the veritable mistress of the house ; which, indeed, she already was, in Sunia's excited fancy. The Sahib had sent money, doubtless, to his own land far over seas, and the grey-head, her father, had brought him this his bride.

Such was her eminently Oriental rendering of a chance tea-drinking between comparative strangers.

But a more potent factor than chance seemed, in very deed,

to be at work on Kalatope ridge that June day. For anon a grey cloud swept suddenly across the face of the sun, and the parched pine-boughs over Sunia's head stirred and whispered mysteriously. She knew the sound and its meaning well. Two minutes later a vivid, snaky streak of lightning flashed past her, and a sound as of the rattle of musketry seemed to rend the very sky. Then, one after one, like liquid bullets, fell the first rain drops of the Great Monsoon.

In less than five minutes' time the clouds were emptying themselves, in a solid sheet of water, upon the thirsty hills, whilst the south-west wind battled lustily with the creaking pine boughs. Sunia fled, dripping, to her smoke-grimed hovel; and endured, in silence, Mai Rādhā's drastic comments upon the new turn of affairs.

In Brodie's hut a council of war was in progress.

'No question of your going in to-night,' he said to young Lindon, as they looked out upon the drenched landscape. 'It'll be a little awkward for your sister though, I'm afraid. But if she doesn't mind using my room, she is more than welcome to it, such as it is; and I think my little grass-cut girl could manage to act as ayah for once in a way. You two fellows can have the second room; and I shall sleep like a top on the lounge in here. I only hope your sister won't be abominably uncomfortable.'

'Oh, rather not. Awfully good of you to give her your room. She'll be as right as a trivet, thanks,' responded the other, with brotherly unconcern. 'She's not a faddy sort at all. Rather enjoys a little upset of this sort than otherwise.'

And it appeared that he spoke truth.

'It will be capital fun,' the fair Edith declared with a certain naïve frankness which did not ill become her, but which nevertheless jarred a little on Brodie's unaccustomed ear. 'And I shall see the little Himalayan beauty after all! Will she really consent to do ayah for me, do you think?' This, with a pretty laugh, and an arch look at Brodie, which missed its mark altogether.

'She will obey my orders, of course,' he returned with grave politeness.

But his assurance on this point proved a trifle premature. For once in her life, Sunia was disposed to be rebellious. When the order reached her that she should cleanse herself to the best of her ability, and carry hot water and a lamp to the Miss-sahib's room, she sent answer flatly: 'Tell the Sahib that I cannot do this thing.'

But the courage of despair is too often the mere effervescence of conscious weakness; and, even as she spoke, Sunia knew in her heart that love and long habit would, in the end, compel her to eat her own brave words.

At the first sound of Brodie's voice calling her from the back verandah, she dashed headlong across the rain-lashed 'compound,' and flung herself, dripping, at his feet.

'Oh, my lord, forgive thy slave that she spoke unseemly words in the bitterness of her heart. Let the Sahib command what he will, it shall be done.'

Then she uprose and faced him, in all the fulness of her wonderful beauty; her hands clasped, her small frame a-quiver with emotion held bravely in check.

Brodie was not a little mystified by her evident reluctance to wait on Miss Lindon. But her words and manner stirred him strangely, and he would willingly have annulled his order, were it not that he shrank from encountering Edith Lindon's arch comments, flanked by Colonel Polden's mercilessly quizzical asides. As it was he spoke soothingly.

'I make no command, Sunia. I ask only that thou shouldst do this thing because that it would be shameful talk that a Miss-sahib should be alone in my house, having no woman to wait on her—and that thou knowest.'

'It is enough, Sahib. I go. What pleasure hath this slave in life, save to do the Huzoor's will?'

And she departed, fulfilled with righteous resolve, but very sore at heart.

Edith Lindon was not more light-minded than others of her sex and age; but she was young, and attractive; and—perhaps not without reason—very well satisfied with herself and with the world at large. She was just now engaged, pleasantly enough, in 'doing' India; because it is the correct thing to 'do' India in these days—to roll Bombay, Delhi, a native state or two, and scraps of the Himalayas, into one great dust-coated pill, and swallow it whole, to be reproduced—with harmless necessary embellishments—at western dinner-tables, for the benefit of the Great Uninitiated.

She regarded her present predicament chiefly in the light of an excellent anecdote, to be added to an already well-stocked list. To complete it there was but one thing needful—a sketch of Sunia herself. But on that point Brodie had proved politely obdurate, and Edith was fain to content herself with taking a mental

photograph of the girl's appearance, to be committed to paper as soon as opportunity should offer. The process entailed a good deal of frank British staring on Miss Lindon's part, when, at length, Sunia presented herself, with the necessary hot water and towels. It did not, however, occur to the Western girl that the 'wild little Hill creature' could possibly resent being inspected. Wherefore, she inspected her carefully, and not without evident admiration.

But—for all her barbaric dress, and her peculiar prejudices in the matter of cleanliness—Sunia was human. A dull, hot flush burnt through her brown skin, making her look more enchanting than ever; but she preserved her Sphinx-like gravity of expression.

The goat's-hair necklace, with its rough gems and silver pendant, captivated Miss Lindon's fancy. It would look charming, thought she, on her 'curio' table at home. Happy thought! Perhaps the girl would sell it.

With the frank assurance of a spoilt child, she stepped up to Sunia, and laid a light, irreverent finger upon a mottled blue lump of turquoise.

'*Burra accha chēse. Hum mangta,*'¹ she remarked smilingly. Her Hindustani, though limited, was terse and to the point. '*Kitna dām? Panch rupee?*'²

Sunia recoiled from her touch as though she had been struck, and a fierce light leaped into her clear eyes. 'These be mine own jewels, Miss-sahib. I am not of the *Bunnia-lōg*, that I should bargain with white folk for rupees.'

For a moment Miss Lindon was taken aback. But, being endowed with more business capacity than sentiment, she concluded that her offer had not been large enough.

'*Dus rupee dega. Bus—aur nahin.*'³ And she held out an expectant hand.

But Sunia, with one glance of speechless scorn, turned and fled through the blustering night.

This, then, was the bride-elect of her Sahib, her hero, her demi-god among men—this smiling, insolent, pink-faced Miss! The strong rush and roar of the storm through the forest mercifully drowned the passionate sobs which racked her body half through the night.

¹ Very good thing. I want.

² What price? Five rupees?

³ I will give ten rupees. That is all—no more.

The sun rose on a green, babbling world next morning. Prismatic hues flashed from the swaying pine-boughs; birds, brooks, and cicadas waxed garrulous exceedingly, and, from out the moist fissures of the rocks, the little brown krait (viper), with others of his slimy kindred, slid stealthily, only to vanish at once amid the moist green verdure of the flower-beds. Away over the plains, a white, billowy mass of cloud gave promise of the triple tyranny of mist, mildew, and mackintoshes.

Brodie and his guests were early astir, and the latter were in their saddles by eight o'clock.

As her host lifted Edith Lindon to her Arab she reminded him laughingly of some English violets he had promised her overnight.

'Please don't trouble about them now, though,' she added sweetly; 'I'll forgive you for forgetting them!'

But Brodie was already in the verandah.

'Won't take me two minutes to pick them,' he called back as he went.

He had made a hobby of his little garden; and there were certain flowers kept sacred even from Dhunnu's zealous fingers. Now, therefore, Brodie knelt down bareheaded in the sunlight, and plunged his hands hastily among the dripping violet leaves. The violet beds being at the back of the house, and the horses in front, he was alone—or apparently so. At all events, he was quite unconscious of a pair of eager eyes that devoured his face from within the sheltering shadow of two great deodar trunks.

But those eyes, in spite of their absorption and of the tears that were in them, saw what his did not—a slimy, living streak of brown, within half a foot of his left hand. In a flash Sunia was at his side, and her brown hand was laid on his, not one second too soon.

Brodie sprang to his feet with a startled cry, and made a futile lunge at the vanishing snakeling, whose name is Death.

Then he turned to Sunia.

'How didst see the reptile? Why, great God!—there's a blood spot on her hand! Did he bite thee, child?'

'Aye, Huzoor, he bit me—and—I die. But what matters it, so that the Sahib lives—to make marriage with the—the white Miss? And I—I pay my debt.'

She swayed where she stood, and a little quiver convulsed her frame. Quick as thought Brodie's arm went round her, and

a sharp little sob escaped her as she leaned all her light weight upon its strength.

'*Kohi hai ! Nizam Din !*' he shouted. 'Take these flowers to the Miss-sahib, and tell the Sahibs to go forward. I cannot come. I will send a letter. And see, bring me at once coffee of the blackest, and the flask of brandy from my dressing-case. Run !'

Then, with voice and face all tenderness, he turned to the dying girl.

'Walk, child, walk—for the love of God ! The brandy may be here in time.'

But she resisted his effort to hurry her forward.

'Nay, Sahib, I have chosen, and—I die. When my lord taketh to him a Memsahib, and goeth hence, then what shall come to this slave ? Death is easy, and I—I pay my debt.'

A sudden suspicion flashed into Brodie's mind. Sunia's whole loving soul was in her eyes, and he read it like an open book.

'There stands no debt betwixt us, Sunia-jee ; and what meaneth this talk of Memsahibs ? I take no Miss-sahib to wife.'

'But the white "Miss," who came—who spoke—'

Her voice broke, and she shuddered again.

'Poor child, poor child,' Brodie muttered under his breath, 'it seems too strange.' Then aloud : 'But, Sunia child, the white "Miss" was naught to me—naught. Lo, she is gone, and I shall not see her more. But see, here is the brandy. Drink, thy Sahib commands thee—drink !'

And he forced the glass between her lips. She took one sip; then shook her head wearily. 'It is Kismet, Sahib. I take no brandy. Let—him go—I die.'

Further argument was useless. The poison was working swiftly; for the krait knows no half measures.

With a stern, '*Kohi mut aou,*'¹ Brodie waved Nizam Din away, and drew the girl's lagging feet toward the verandah.

He laid her tenderly in his own long chair, and bent close down to her as he spoke. A strange new light illumined all his face.

'Sunia, thou art dying, speak truth. What right hadst thou to do this thing ?'

¹ 'Let no one come.'

The glazing eyes lightened for an instant, and the lips parted in a radiant smile.

'The only right that belongs to women-folk, Huzoor—I—loved.'

'And I? What thinkest thou?'

In the emotion of the moment he did not stay to weigh his words.

'I think naught, Sahib. I love—it is enough.'

Her voice was a mere whisper now. But her wide eyes clung desperately to his face. Impelled by an irresistible impulse, Brodie stooped and kissed her fervently upon the lips and brow.

'Live for ever, Lord of my Life,' came the familiar greeting. But he rather saw the words than heard them.

Then Mai Râdha came, and smote the hill-sides with vociferous grief; for she claimed her right to mourn as foster mother to the child.

Brodie retreated to his office, and sat there for two full hours, staring blankly at a half-written letter, and considering the strange thing that had come to pass.

He was a lonely man—sisterless, motherless—but until this moment he had not been aware of the fact. Slowly it dawned on him that he was not, and would never be again, quite as he had been; for a hitherto unacknowledged element had been added to his conception of life. He had seen with his own eyes the love that is strong as death; and to see that once in a lifetime is a wholesome thing for a man.

When, at length, he rose, and shook himself back into his official shell, he realised that he had narrowly escaped committing an act of sentimental folly, which would probably have ruined his career. For which mercy he was scarcely as grateful as he ought to have been.

But the best of us are three-parts human after all.]

M. D.

At the Sign of the Ship.

BYRON writes of a certain sacred poet that he

Breaks into blank the Gospel of St. Luke,
And boldly pilfers from the Pentateuch.

The modern novelist also makes his raids on the New Testament. Here he finds plots and characters ready made. And the curious result is that many of the clergy applaud the process, while the ordinary man of letters is aghast at what he thinks the irreverence and bad taste. I have arrived at a theory of these things by aid of deep reflection, and am prepared to explain why a large portion of the public love novels on sacred subjects, and why many of the clergy confer their benediction on these romances. This hypothesis we can illustrate from the recent novel of M. Sienkiewicz, that really powerful and original writer.

* * *

The popularity of 'Quo Vadis'—in America—what does it mean? What is the significance of this unwieldy success, which follows the fairy feet of 'Trilby'? The fact seems to be that Early Christian novels have always an attraction for what we may call the Intellectual Middle Classes. That they are interested in early Christianity is much to their credit. But that they should prefer to see the most momentous and sacred events through the spectacles of M. Sienkiewicz, or Miss Corelli, or the author of 'Ben Hur' (which sounds like the name of a mountain in the Highlands), is certainly curious. We have the Gospels, and the authors of the Gospels, even on the newest and most insane system of criticism, were a good deal nearer the events than Miss Corelli and the other novelists. There is also a large body of instructed commentary, but you do not find the public besieging the libraries for that.

* * *

The extraordinary thing is that not only the public but *les raffinés* are addicted to Early Christian romance. Nobody could be more contemptuous than Lockhart, more dainty and exclusive, intellectually, than Mr. Pater, more remote from the most modern commonplace than Lord Lytton. Yet all these tried their hands at Early Christian romance. To be sure none of them brought in what the more popular authors do bring in. Lord Lytton came no nearer than the son of the widow of Nain. Mr. Pater was chiefly interested in his hero, whom we fondly expected to make love to Messalina, but who was not half an Epicurean. Lytton's novel was the best of the three; I confess to a partiality for Arbaces, and the gladiators were fine fellows. 'The Gladiators'—surely Whyte Melville must be added to the list of Early Christian novelists—while 'Hypatia' is rather remote from Jerusalem.

* * *

All these novels are rather pedantic. One cannot really be interested in *balnea*, and *vomitoria*, and *atria*, and *impluvia*, and the Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, when done into fiction. I have only read the early Early Christian romances, Lytton's, Lockhart's, and 'Marius the Epicurean,' but I always know what is coming. There is always a Briton, enslaved and virtuous. There is always a nice good Christian girl, with a Roman 'District.' There is always a luxurious Roman, 'a-winking at her with his wicked old eye.' There is always a Christian *père noble* who goes to the lions with dignity. There is always a gladiatorial set-to; and Nero, with his emerald eye-glass; and the Catacombs. The noble Briton, after performing prodigies of valour, is usually converted, and marries the pleasing Early Christian girl. There is commonly a Greek philosopher, a parasite, and a minor poet. Now, except for the opportunities of torturing people, and lighting temples with live torches, and describing *l'orgie échevelée*, and sailing near the wind about Petronius Arbiter, these are not good materials. *Atria*, *vomitoria*, the baths, the *retiarius* are now pretty bare. Dean Farrar has done them, or some of them. Everybody has done them. The local colours have been used again and again. This is so evident that nobody could hope for a 'boom' with an archaeological novel on pre-Christian Rome. *Catinile* is a fine blackguard, but he no longer 'abuses our patience.' The flirtations of Ovid and Julia would not win the American reader. The affair of the Bacchic Mysteries is scandalous, but the scandal is too old. These themes are improper; propriety is saved

by bringing in Early Christians, as a contrast to the delightful naughtiness of Rome.

* * *

What really does take the public's fancy in 'Quo Vadis,' and 'The Sorrows of Barabbas,' and the rest, is the element of the reporter and interviewer. Mark Twain 'wrote up' his murder of Cæsar in the style of the American penny-a-liner, and probably he was more read than Shakespeare's play on the same topic. There was an air of familiarity, of the contemporary, in Mark Twain's account of that pedantic crime. Not everyone has read the Gospels, but everyone has heard of the principal actors. Just as the public does not read books (except a few novels), but likes to read about the authors of the books 'At Home,' so it likes to read a lively sketch of an Apostle at home. Peter's wife's mother would make good 'copy,' also the treatment of Peter's wife by the local medical man. A Demoniac at Home is thrilling, and to know what kind of clothes Pontius Pilate wore is a separate ecstasy. Paul's own hired house; the rent he paid; his modest furniture, his library, the fair Thecla (ah, *there* is a theme for a problem novel!), a dinner at Paul's (details out of cribs to Horace or Juvenal), Peter dropping in to see Paul; an altercation with Simon Magus, this kind of *rappartage* just suits the public. These things are, indeed, Interviews with Celebrities. How much further the popular novelist dares to go I confess that I am not anxious to inquire. Judas I have met (in an American novel); he was fond of Mary Magdalene, who had tortoise-shell coloured eyes. Judas was represented as 'coming in, more volcanic than ever,' for his flame was not crowned. To like to read such stuff proves a lack of humour, of imagination, and, one would say, of reverence, but many of the clergy seem of a different opinion, and it is their business. Perhaps we should look at these books as analogous to the old Miracle Plays, and as proof that the public, though familiar, is not contemptuous, but *bien pensant*. Perhaps they 'do good.' This, I think, is why so many of the clergy approve of Early Christian novels. They exactly answer in our day, and granting our social conditions to the old dramas in which Biblical History was acted in Miracle and Mystery plays, they fill up the space which the imagination leaves vacant, and show the characters in real dresses and properties. Meanwhile the critic's sense of propriety is offended, though no harm is meant, and probably no harm is done.

* * *

Cases of the Fire Walk, of 'passing through the fire' to Moloch, or some other god or demon, continue to be reported. The Fijians gave a great example last autumn, and I believe that a steamer carried sightseers from New Zealand. The report, in a New Zealand newspaper, was rather vague. Now an excellent case is printed, 'from a Hindoo Correspondent,' in the *Madras Mail* (no date with cutting, posted to me, by a Mysore correspondent, on February 28). I quote some passages, in the faint hope that some scientific inquiries may be made. For years, alas! I have vainly hoped that either anthropologists, or psychologists, or physiologists, will look into the extraordinary performances which are reported from so many quarters. In this case, in South Canara, there have been epidemics of cholera and small-pox, and the ceremonies were the native form of sanitary measures. From one point of view they *may* do good. The Red Indian medicine men used to swallow a cradle, or a plank, before setting to work on a patient with their form of the Faith Cure, cure by suggestion. The invalid, seeing what he took for a miracle, was ready to believe in his medical attendant, which is half the battle that the doctor has to fight. Possibly the spectacle of the Fire Walk does hearten up the native lookers-on, and does encourage them not to take cholera or small-pox, as they conceive that the demons of these diseases are now propitiated.

* * *

'At the place, which is commonly a large field owned by the *potaīl*, are congregated crowds of sightseers, believers of the lower castes preponderating, not omitting the magnates of the town and its suburbs specially invited for the occasion. A large heap of fire wood of particular kinds of trees—the tamarind, for example (every item of the ceremony is regulated by a particular procedure)—is lit. After the logs are fully burnt up the live cinders are collected in a conical heap of ten or twelve feet diameter at bottom, and about three to four feet in height. The larger the heap the greater the pleasure of the devil dancer, who latterly complains that the heap is not large enough. At some fifty yards from the heap, and facing the east, the *bhandara* and paraphernalia of the devil are placed in a decorated pandal. The devil dancer elaborately paints his face (red dots and lines over yellow ground), decks his head with what tinsel or gold ornaments funds can supply, surmounted by a plate-shaped crown prepared of white, tender cocoa leaf; surrounding his chest, over a cloth

loosely worn, is another ornament prepared of this material and shaped like an inverted boat.

' By the time the devil dancer is completely dressed the votaries, going by the name of *Belchampadas*, have returned and assembled at this sanctified place, where the devil dancer too takes his stand. Amidst the din of the usual music, shouts of the *Belchampadas*, fireworks, &c., the devil is invoked. A person called the "devil's man," who is in charge of the place and acts as priest, sprinkles water from a lotah over the devil dancer. Soon the dancer sways and whirls, and one can notice that he is now possessed. Foremost comes this worshipper towards the heap of red-hot cinders, walks round it, lotah in hand, in the approved form, sprinkling water from the lotah on the heap as he encircles it, and facing it from where he turned, slowly walks bare-footed over the heap as unconcernedly as though he was pacing the field around. He retires to the pandal. The *Belchampadas* stationed there, and numbering over a dozen, rush thence with a wild cry and run bare-footed over the heap along the track trod by the worshipper, run back to the pandal, rush again into the heap, repeating the thing over a dozen times, and, like the worshipper, doing it without wincing, and stepping as though their feet had never trod on red-hot cinders. This done, they pace round the heap, the cinders of which are stirred again and collected anew in the original conical heap for the devil dancer to fall over it. The dancer approaches it, two votaries holding him by the hand. Whereas the worshipper and the *Belchampadas* walked or ran over the heap, the devil dancer reclines on it on his back, and is each time lifted from it by the two men holding him. These men in the act of dragging or lifting the devil dancer, and standing to his right and left, have to plunge their right and left foot in the cinders, but they do not relax their hold of the devil dancer in the belief that at the time the devil protects them from the heat, which is insensible to them. Again and again the devil dancer falls bodily over the heap, frequently on his back, often on his face, which reaches the top of the heap, in this case the inverted boat-like ornament of cocoa leaves intercepts at his chest some live cinders which collect there while he is dragged down; and his frequent repetition of thus falling is only interrupted by the attempt of his holders to extinguish the fire of the folds of the strips of cocoa leaf hanging from the waist. This putting out of the fire by squeezing the folds is done to prevent their being totally burnt up, since after the close of this ceremony

the devil dancer in the remnant of his decorations has to march through the villages for the purpose of exorcising the epidemic from them.

'After the conclusion of this part of the ceremony of falling into the fire, the next principal item of the celebration is the marching of the devil dancer through the village with the avowed object of driving off the disease. The *Belchampadas* who accompany him cut themselves over the chest, neck, and head with their sharp big knives, causing wounds which bleed profusely. Some cut the collar bone in two, but after everything connected with the ceremony is over, and they have bathed, nothing but scars of long healed-up wounds are discernible over the gashes they gave themselves. The devil dancer too is bare-footed. Having seen him as he was painting his face he looked an oldish thin man with a stoop in the back, utterly incapable of the exertion he afterwards went through. This walking over the red-hot cinders and falling into them I have seen, and would like to know if anybody would account for the possibility of the performance in any way except on the strong belief of these people in the powers of the devil they worship to protect them from the pain of the injuries they, in proof of their devotion, inflict on themselves.'

* * *

This description, though long, is abbreviated. The performance is in essence identical with those of the Fijians, Klings, Bulgarians, of the classical Hirpi, and of many other peoples, including, I believe, the Japanese, as described by Mr. Lafcadio Hearne, whose book I have not had an opportunity to read. The cuttings and woundings, so suddenly healed, are reported from Siberia, Thibet, and among the Fakirs of North Africa. Like the writer in the *Madras Mail*, I would like to know if anybody can account for the possibility of the performance in any way except by the strong belief of these Abednegos in the fiery furnace. If mind can really conquer matter to this extent, the tales told of Daniel Home's performances with fire fall into a natural class of phenomena. But I fear that science, of all sorts, will continue to behave like the adder, which presses one ear into the dust and squeezes its tail into the other (according to an early Father), lest it should receive unwelcome information. The successful fire-walker, *prima facie*, seems to rely on having more faith 'than a grain of mustard seed.' Faith in what seems to make no difference.

* * *

Confidence is the thing. Our unhappy team in Australia perhaps lacked confidence, though they began well. One prefers to avert the eyes from these deplorable events. No doubt there are always excuses. But, when Mr. Mason comes to represent English bowling, either he has marvellously improved or there was something wrong with Richardson and Hearne. Mr. Giffen does not lack confidence, to judge from his *With Bat and Ball*. One does not need to say to Mr. Giffen, like the impassioned young lady in *Punch* to the poet, 'Tell me more, more, more about yourself!' He tells a great deal. In his opinion K. S. Ranjitsinhji's innings at Old Trafford (154 not out) 'was absolutely the finest innings I have seen.' One of Mr. Edward Lyttelton's, for Middlesex against Australia, many years ago, was, I think, the finest I ever saw, with one of Mr. A. G. Steel's (accompanied by Barlow), and another of Mr. Forster's against Cambridge, when Cambridge won. Mr. Giffen prophesied the Australian success of 1897-98 (p. 143), but

Gin it no be weel bobbit,
We'll bob it again.

It would be poor fun if we were always successful, and an aged country must respect her vigorous descendants. The match for Britons to see was that at Melbourne (Giffen, p. 139). Australia won the toss; Mr. Stoddart and Mr. Giffen were 'white as a sheet' when the coin went up, and Australia opened with 414. We got 305, Mr. Giffen missing Mr. Maclarens. We finished by putting on 297 for four wickets, the first wicket having fallen for very little. Brown knocked the Australians about for 140, and Ward 'did as he liked,' being given 'not out' for a catch at wicket, Mr. Giffen says, the bowler obstructing the umpire's view. These things are 'rubs of the green,' and I think that Mr. A. G. Steel told me he once had similar luck against Mr. A. H. Evans. My brothers were at this match, and averred that life in the colony would have been impossible (for Britons) but for Richardson, Brown, and Ward. I have not yet heard of their suicide. Mr. Giffen remarks that he and his friends are 'in their element' when the thermometer is 105° in the shade, while our people 'are almost prostrated.' Shower baths only do harm. This kind of thing may have affected our heroes, whom the Carthaginians would certainly have crucified. But we have the climatic advantage in our own country. By the way, I am not sure that the most exciting match was not at Sydney:

Australia,	586
	166.
England,	325
	437.

Perhaps, where so much turns on the toss, it would be fair, in Test Matches, to let each side have the preference alternately. But that is a radical suggestion. Judging from Mr. Giffen's remarks, in Australia there is too much chaff from the gallery. This is not a point in which we ought to take a lesson from our conquerors. A cricket match should not resemble the theatre at Oxford, at Commemoration.

* * *

The news of the death of Mr. James Payn arrives as I write. A man more brave, kind, simple, and humorous I have never known. He was one of the last of our humorists, but at this moment we think more of his indomitable courage in the face of a long and painful malady, and of that goodness of his, that *don d'encouragement* to which so many younger writers have owed so much, a debt which they have ever acknowledged by an unalterable affection.

Mr. Payn was, I suppose, the first Author, known to me as an Author, whom I ever met. It was in Edinburgh, when he was a young man, editing *Chambers's Journal*, and I was a small boy. We both dined at the house of one of my family, and I remember his black curly hair and handsome laughing face, as if it were yesterday. The dinner was followed by a whist party, in which 'I did not take a hand,' nor did I ever meet Mr. Payn again, I think, till the gloss had gone out of his black hair, though his mirth was as unaffected as ever. Possibly because, as a boy, one knew him slightly, his writings always appealed to me from the first. The public, the novel-reading public, like a romancer to take himself seriously. This was a thing that Mr. Payn simply could not do. I remember a character of his who has just committed fratricide, no less, and yet converses in a style quite as diverting as that of Mr. Richard Swiveller. He comes out of a storm of no ordinary kind, with his brother's blood on his hands, and yet his chaff is airy and exhilarating. Then there is a scene in which a man, about to drown his wife, is stopped by a great Saurian creature which emerges from the water in the nick of time. I ventured to ask Mr. Payn if this was not putting public credulity to a great strain, but he merely smiled, and changed the subject. The novel-

reading public, he knew, would stand it from him, though nobody else could have taken these liberties. In fact, I don't think that the public ever recognised a humorist in Mr. Payn. I believe they read him as solemnly, and with as little sense of the joke, as they read Mr. Hall Caine. Now, the point in Mr. Payn's work was the joke, first the permitted frivolity of dialogue, of high spirits, and then the circumstance that the public was taking his villains (he boiled one, and put another into a lava stream) in earnest. There is not so much mirth in ten years of our modern literature, as in Mr. Payn's *High Spirits* and *Glow-Worm Tales*. He was of the descendants of Dickens, but had the advantage of education, and of *not* believing in himself to the portentous extent which Dickens attained. He had a very great personal affection for that master and friend of his, and (as has been said) to the last displayed the kindest faculty of encouragement to younger men. Mr. Payn liked to sketch his own foibles, his love of whist and a good dinner, his unconquerable hatred of exercise and of evening dress. If any one is sad, with or without cause, let him read Mr. Payn's *High Spirits*, or *Meliboeus* (if he can get that early work), and be comforted. Causes enough of melancholy had Mr. Payn, like the rest of us, but he never whined, or repined, or reviled the nature of things; nor ever did I hear him speak a word of jealousy about younger men and more successful men; and often less deserving men than himself.

ANDREW LANG.

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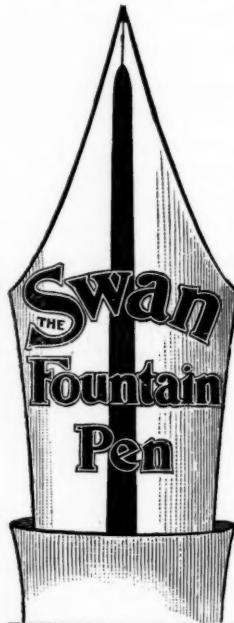
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The 'Donna.'

In accordance with the announcement in the January number, the connection of LONGMAN'S MAGAZINE with the 'Donna' ceased at the end of March. It is probable that the Sisters may continue the truck for some little time longer, but in the Editor's judgment the time has come when he is no longer justified in asking for the subscriptions of his readers towards her support. The final account is printed overleaf, showing that on March 31 there was a balance against the charity amounting to 41*l.* 9*s.* 8*d.* The Editor will be glad to receive any contributions towards this deficit up to May 14, on which date the 'Donna Fund' will be closed.

Amounts received last month :

Mrs. Sturge, Dawlish, parcel of clothing. An Old Lady 1*l.* W. B. (Donna) 10*s.*; (Workroom) 10*s.*; (Shelter) 10*s.* M. W. (Night Refuge) 5*s.*

*DONNA' FOOD-TRUCK, NOVEMBER 1, 1897, TO MARCH 31, 1898.

		Receipts.			Expenditure.		
		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
1897							
November	To food sold	.	.	.	10	13	7½
December	" "	.	.	.	8	15	7½
January	" "	.	.	.	6	17	11½
February	" "	.	.	.	7	5	5
March	" "	.	.	.	8	9	6
"	Donations received by Sisters	.	.	.	4	13	6
Deficit	.	.	.	.	41	9	8
					<u>£182</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>5½</u>
1898							
Nov.	By Balance overdrawn from last account	.	.	.	25	7	10½
	Cost of food, £21 7 3; bread, £5 15 10	.	.	.	27	3	1
	Cooking, £5 10 0; wages, £3 18 6; tins, 5s. 6d.	.	.	.	9	14	0
	Truck hire, 2s. 6d.	.	.	.	0	0	6
Dec.	Cost of food, £17 11 4; bread, £5 11 0	.	.	.	23	2	4
	Wages, £4 6 6; cooking, £5; truck hire, 2s. 6d.	.	.	.	9	9	0
Jau.	Cost of food, £13 15 11; bread, £4 2 0	.	.	.	17	17	11
	Wages, £3 14 0; cooking, £5; tins, 5s.	.	.	.	8	19	0
	Truck hire, 2s. 6d.	.	.	.	0	2	6
Feb.	Cost of food, £14 6 10; bread, £4 7 9	.	.	.	18	14	7
	Cooking, £5; wages, £3 14 0	.	.	.	8	14	0
	Truck hire, 2s. 6d.; tins, 5s.	.	.	.	0	7	6
Mar.	Cost of food, £16 19 0; bread, £5 19 8	.	.	.	22	18	8
	Cooking, £5 16 8; wages, £4 6 4; truck hire, 2s. 6d.	.	.	.	10	5	6
					<u>£182</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>5½</u>
For Night Refuge	.	.	.	.	£	s.	d.
" Workroom	.	.	.	.	23	0	6
					5	10	0
					<u>£28</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>6</u>